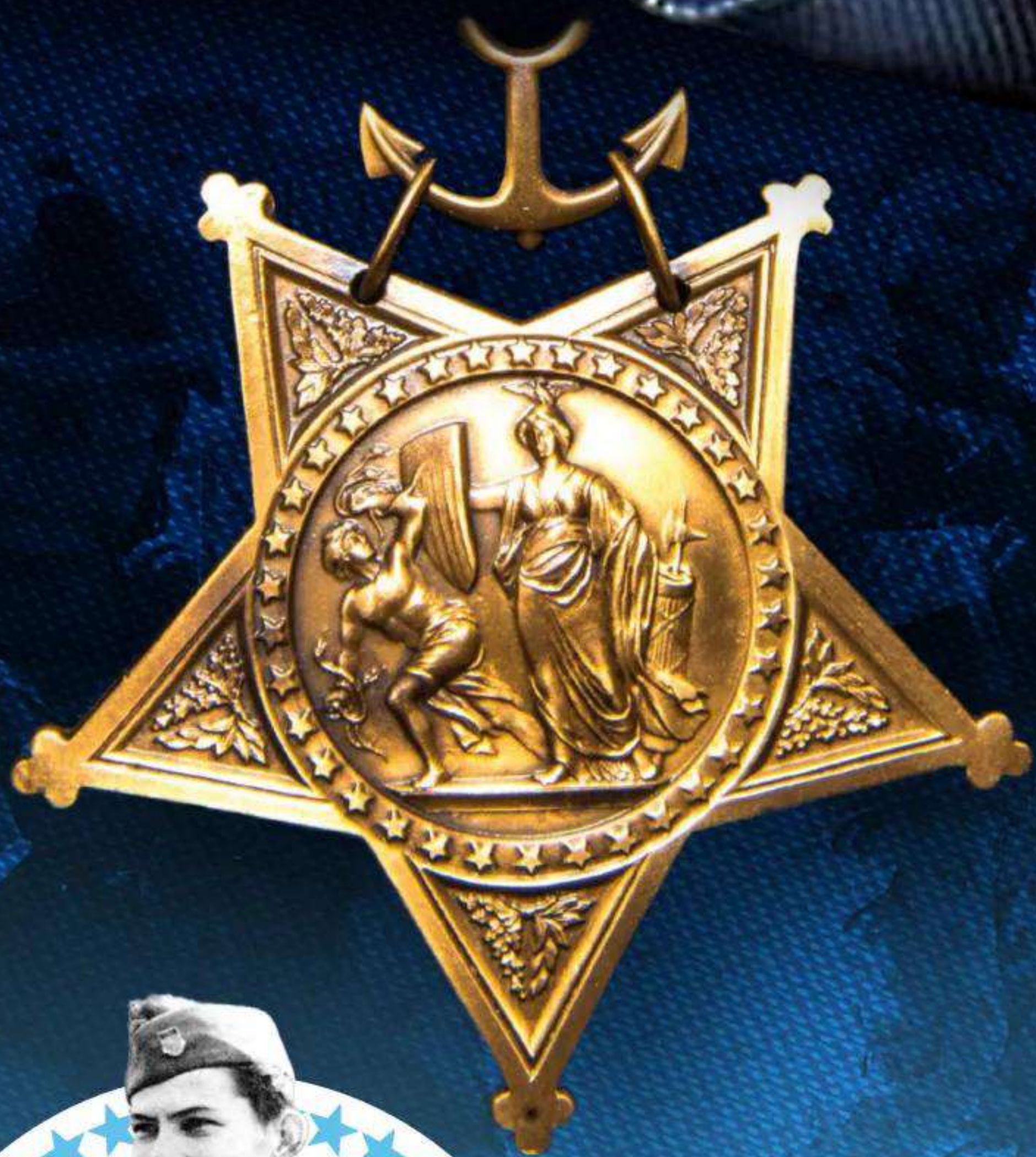


NEW

From the makers of  
**HISTORY  
WAR**

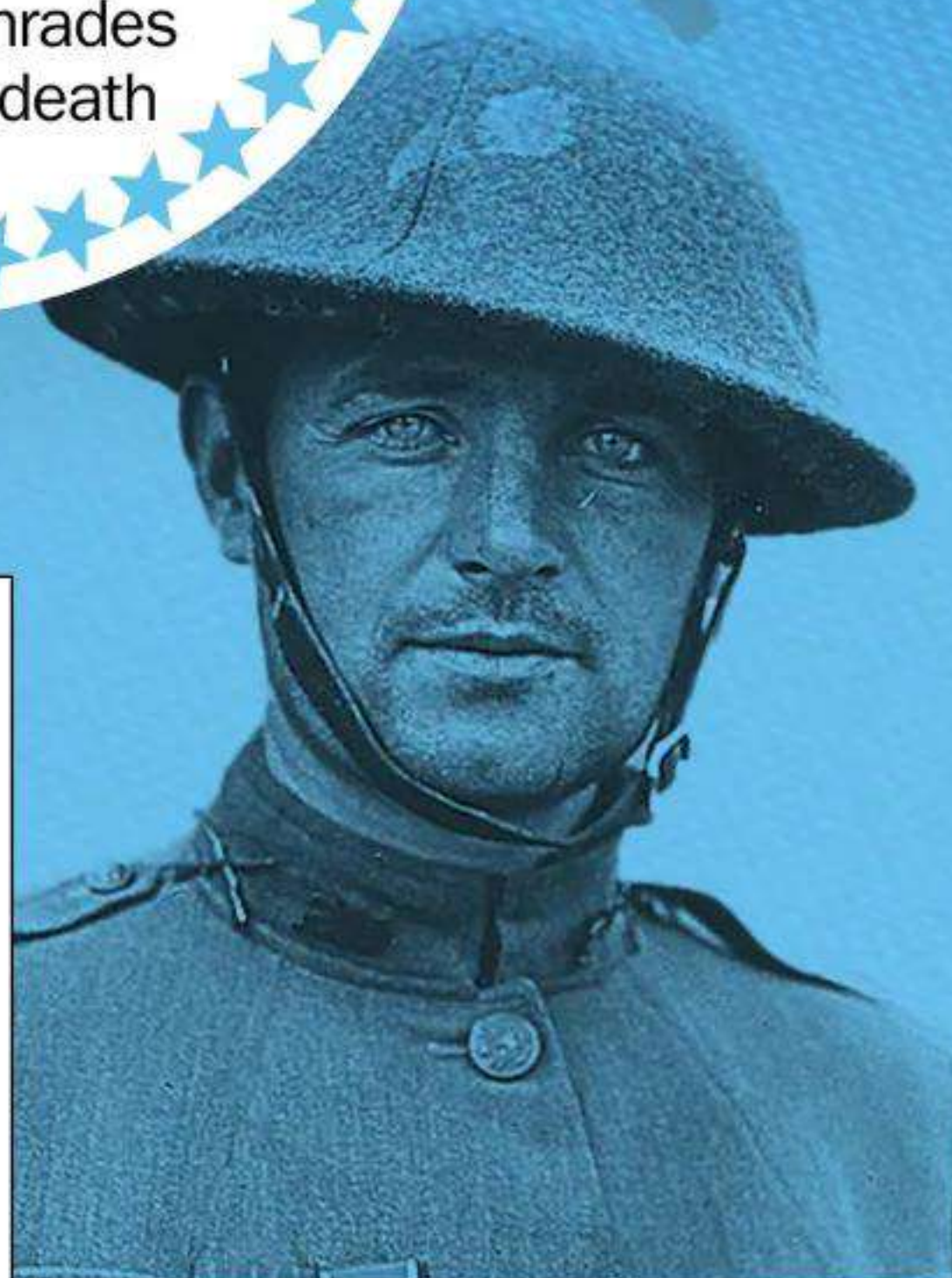
# MEDAL OF HONOR HEROES

GALLANT ACTS THAT WON AMERICA'S HIGHEST MILITARY DECORATION



## HACKSAW RIDGE

The combat medic who  
saved 75 comrades  
from certain death



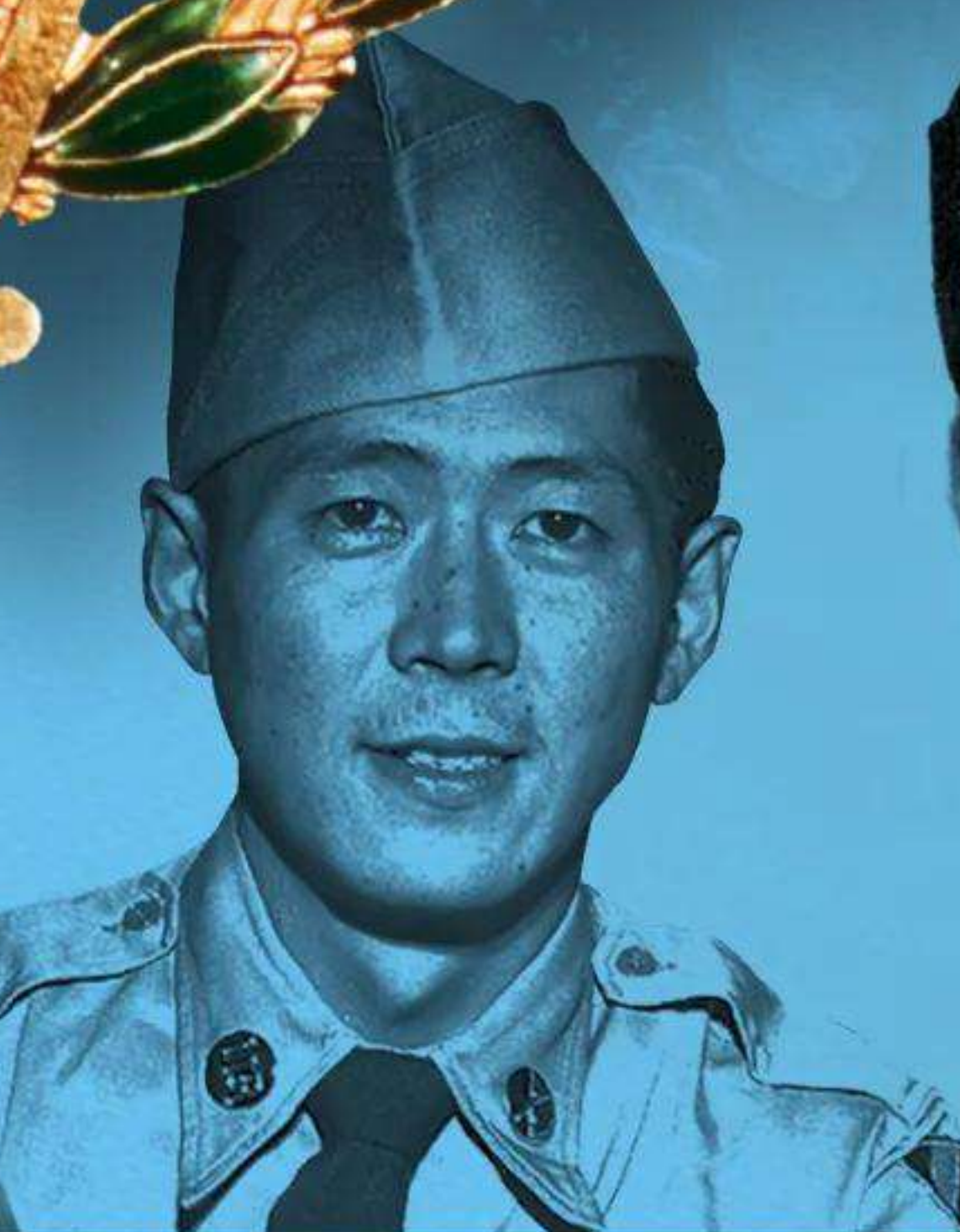
## CIVIL WAR SAVIOUR

Explore the story of the only woman  
to earn America's greatest medal



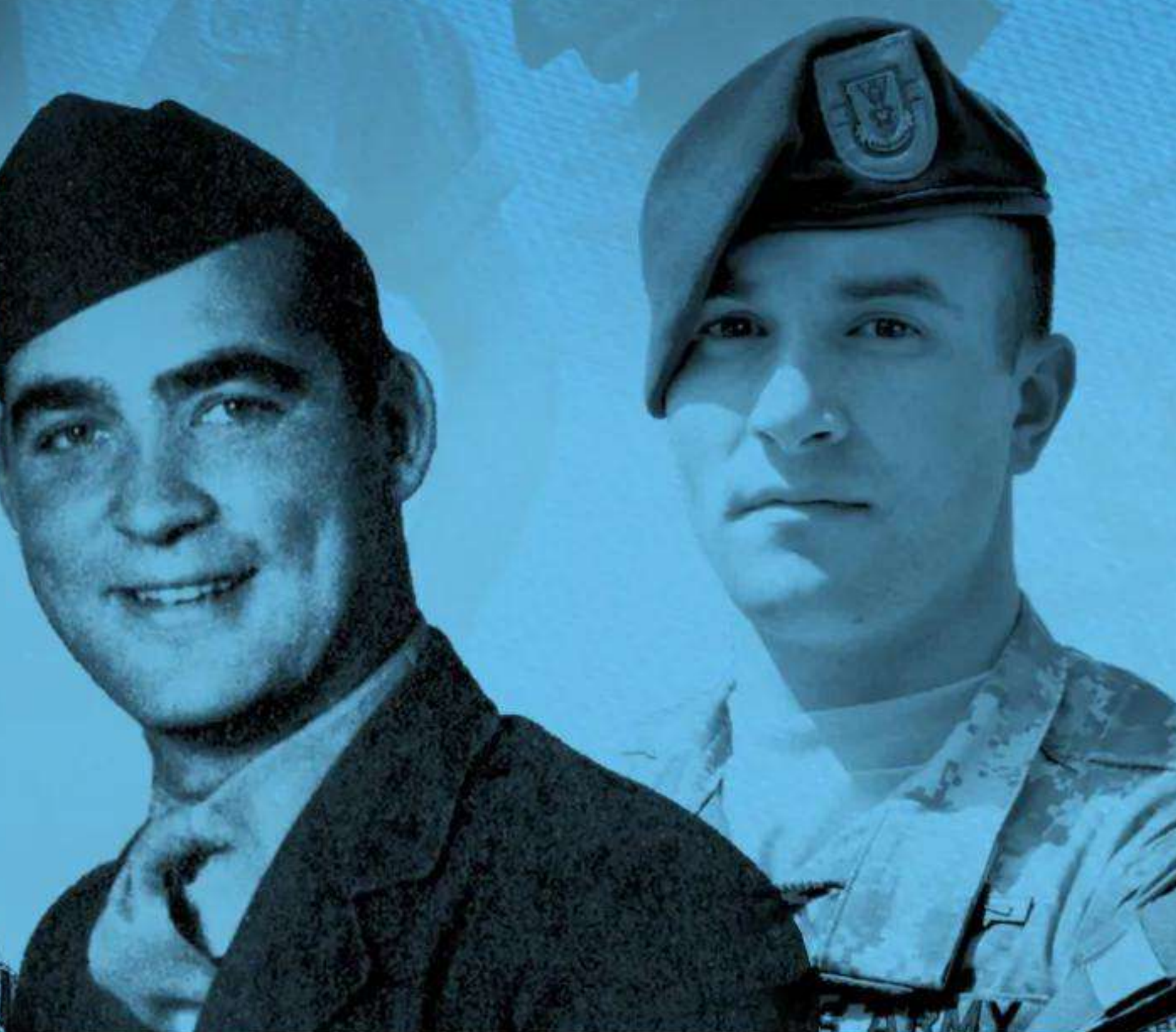
## DARING DOUBLES

Uncover the selfless actions that  
won 19 men not one but two Medals



## WWII RECIPIENTS

Meet the brave fighters who gave  
their all in the struggle for freedom



Digital  
Edition

FUTURE

FIRST EDITION





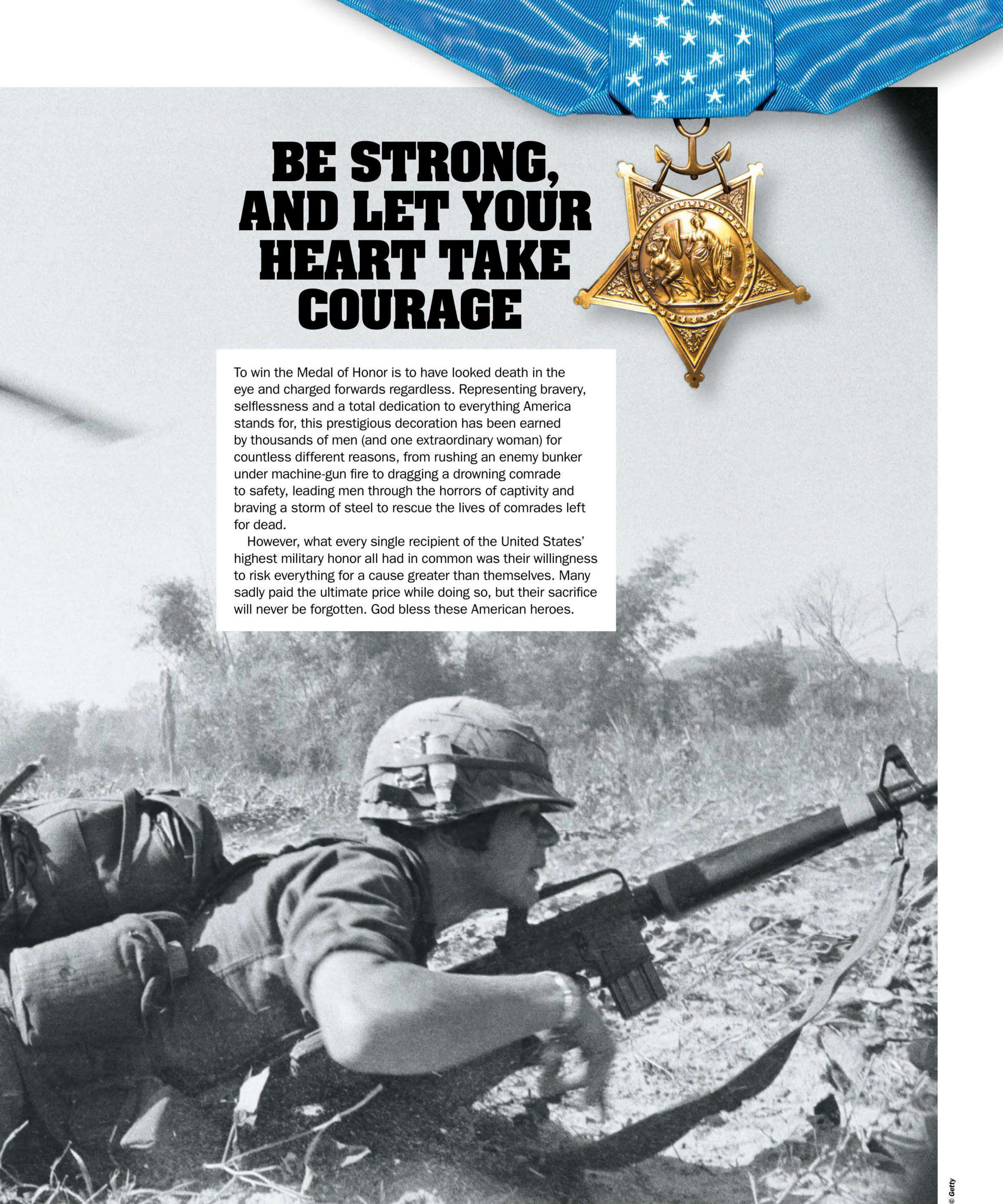


# BE STRONG, AND LET YOUR HEART TAKE COURAGE



To win the Medal of Honor is to have looked death in the eye and charged forwards regardless. Representing bravery, selflessness and a total dedication to everything America stands for, this prestigious decoration has been earned by thousands of men (and one extraordinary woman) for countless different reasons, from rushing an enemy bunker under machine-gun fire to dragging a drowning comrade to safety, leading men through the horrors of captivity and braving a storm of steel to rescue the lives of comrades left for dead.

However, what every single recipient of the United States' highest military honor all had in common was their willingness to risk everything for a cause greater than themselves. Many sadly paid the ultimate price while doing so, but their sacrifice will never be forgotten. God bless these American heroes.





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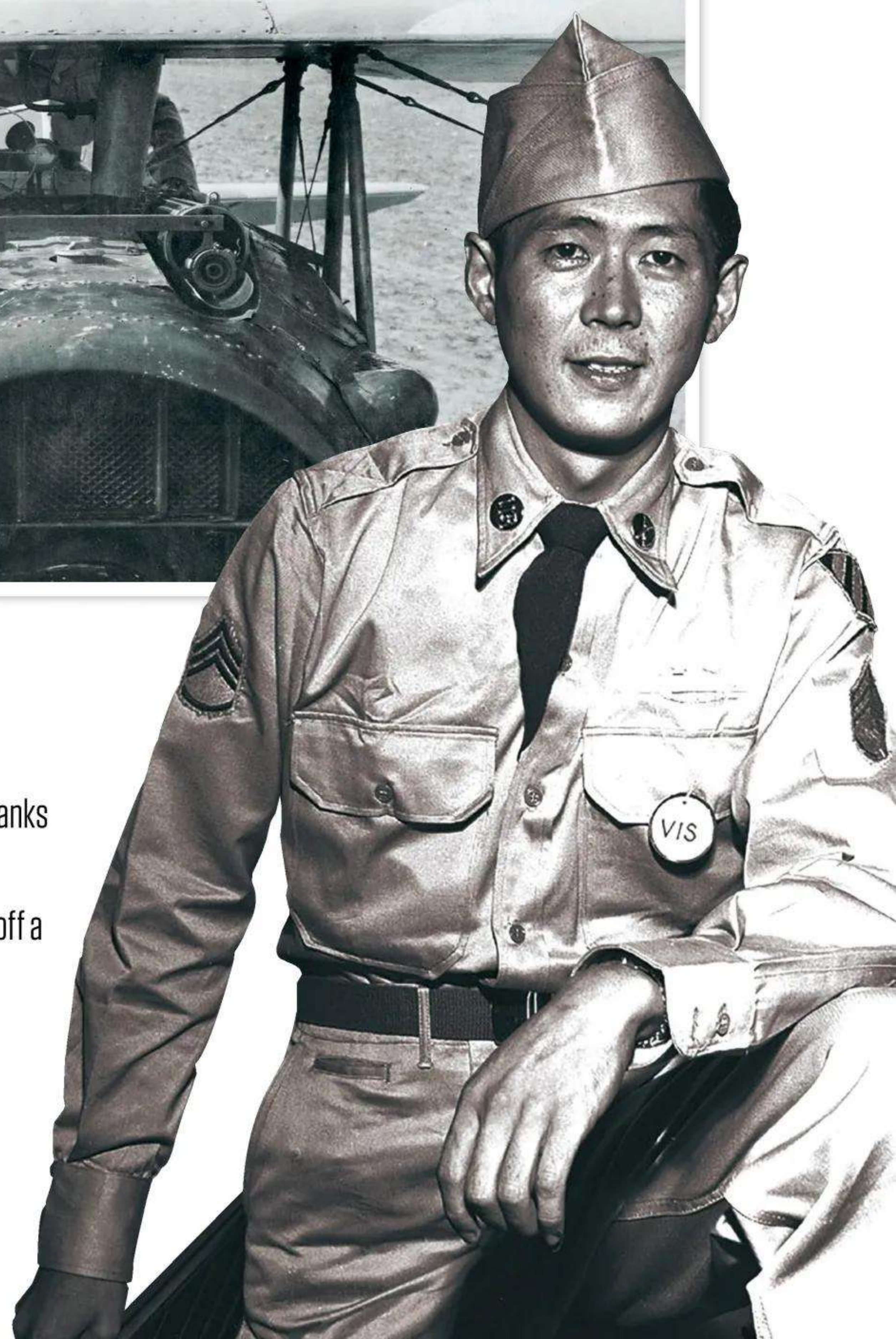
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# THESE DISUNITED STATES

Sparked by the election of a president opposed to slavery, the American Civil War claimed more lives than any other in U.S. history and gave rise to the Medal of Honor









# Origins of THE HONOR

The U.S.'s highest military decoration has seen a lot of change over the years, but it has always remained a potent symbol of courage and sacrifice

WORDS: TIM WILLIAMSON

**A**t the outbreak of the American Civil War in April 1861, there were no official military decorations for valor and merit regularly issued to U.S. forces. The Badge of Military Merit, created by General (later President) George Washington in 1782 and later to become the Purple Heart, had already been largely forgotten, with only three issued to sergeants in Washington's Continental Army. Just months after the start of hostilities, in December 1861, Senator James Grimes put a bill before Congress for the creation of 200 medals to be issued to members of the U.S. Navy who "distinguish themselves by their gallantry". The bill was signed by President Abraham Lincoln that same month and followed by a similar bill in 1862 approving the creation of 2,000 medals for the army.

As with Washington's original decoration, the medals were intended to recognize ordinary soldiers and sailors—privates and non-commissioned officers, rather than senior officers. However, in 1863 Congress extended the eligibility to all Army servicemen and also made the award a permanent decoration for the nation's armed forces.

The first Congressional Medal of Honor (its official full title) recipient was Private Jacob Parrot, who had fought behind enemy lines to disrupt rail and communications links. He was the first of six surviving members of this daring raid presented with the medal by Secretary of State for War Edwin Stanton on March 25, 1863. Not to be outdone, the Navy issued its first medal two months later to Signal Quartermaster Robert Williams.

Controversially, there was initially no strict citation process for nominating and receiving the medal, which resulted in thousands being issued for acts during the Civil War alone. Some recipients simply applied personally to receive their medals, with little supporting evidence of their acts, years after the end of the war. Other times, medals were issued in error. For example, in 1863, the entire regiment—over 800 men—of the 27th Maine was issued medals for protecting the capital Washington, D.C. The error was rectified some 50 years later.

By the end of the 19th century stricter rules and criteria were brought in to control the high number of medals being issued. Qualifying acts



*Above: To date 3,525 people have been awarded the Medal of Honor, 618 of them posthumously*

**"THERE WAS INITIALLY NO STRICT CITATION PROCESS FOR NOMINATING THE MEDAL, WHICH RESULTED IN THOUSANDS BEING ISSUED DURING THE CIVIL WAR ALONE"**

**Many applied to receive a Medal of Honor for acts during the Civil War**

had to demonstrate "gallantry and intrepidity", while reliable eyewitness testimony was also required as evidence. Crucially, applications could not be made by the would-be recipient, and there was a time limit set of a year from the date of the act by which applications could be made.

These stricter rules made the medal far rarer and more prestigious—befitting the nation's highest military honor. In 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt also made changes to formalize a medal ceremony that is still in place today. Recipients would be presented with the medal personally by the President of the United States in Washington, D.C. Roosevelt himself was nominated but failed to be awarded the medal in his lifetime for acts during the Spanish-American War. This oversight was rectified when he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor by President Bill Clinton, making Roosevelt the first U.S. President to receive the honor.

*Below: President Clinton awards the medal to Theodore Roosevelt's great grandson, Tweed, on January 16, 2001*

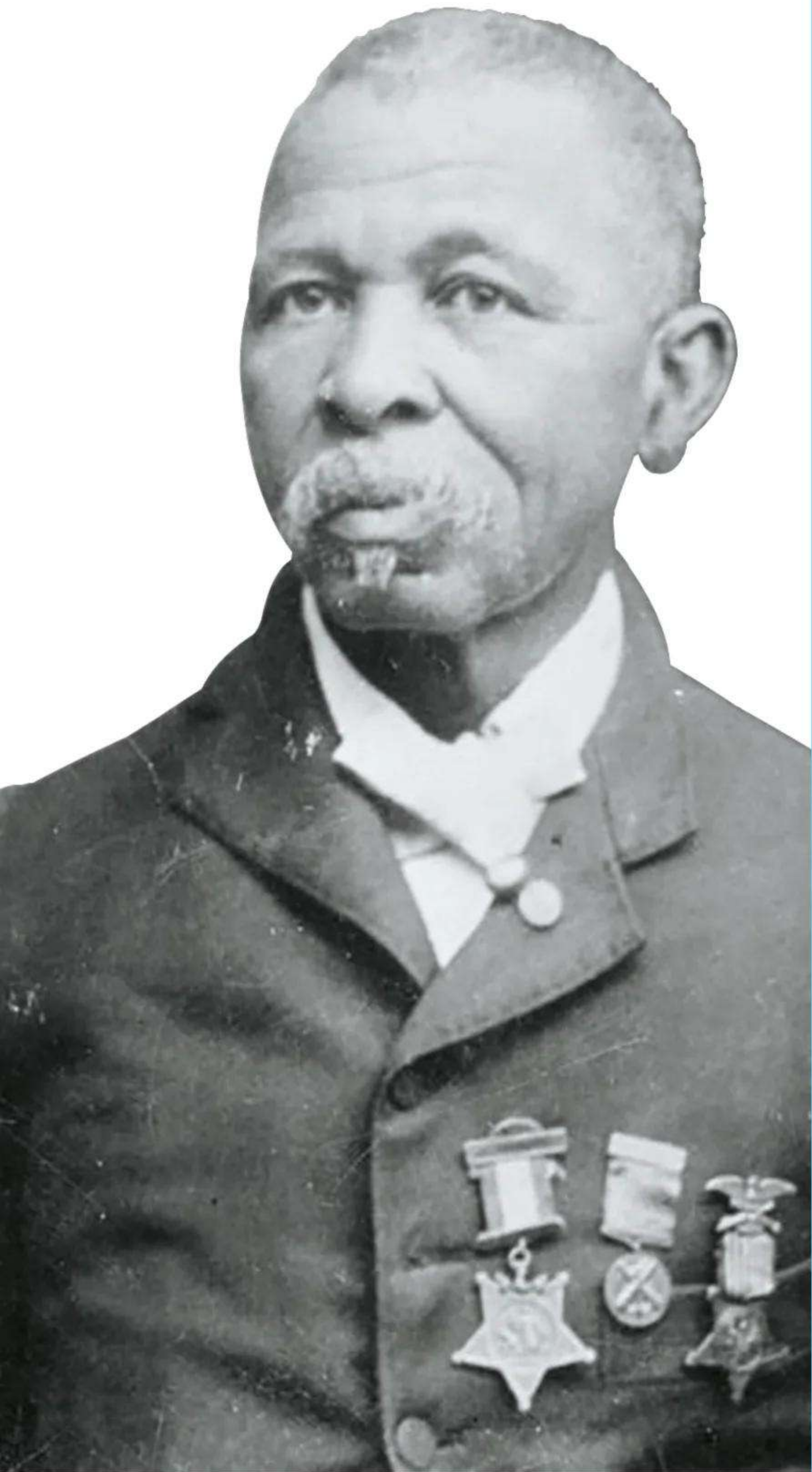






**Above:** An example of an early army Medal of Honor awarded during the Civil War

**Below:** Sailor John Lawson won the naval Medal of Honor for his courage under fire aboard the U.S.S. Hartford during the Battle of Mobile Bay on August 5, 1864



# A CHANGING DESIGN

**WHILE MANY OF THE MEDAL'S FEATURES HAVE REMAINED UNCHANGED, THERE HAVE NONETHELESS BEEN MANY VERSIONS IN ITS LONG HISTORY**

Like today, the original designs for the Army and Navy's medals varied slightly, though both were an inverted five-point star suspended below a ribbon. In the center of both stars is depicted Minerva, the Roman goddess associated with war and wisdom, who is fighting a figure clutching snakes in his hands known as Discord.

Encircling the scene are 34 stars, representing the nation's 34 states in 1862—including those 11 Confederate states that had seceded from the Union. The original Navy medal featured an anchor fastening below a clasp decorated with stars, while the Army version opted for an eagle, mounted upon two cannons and clutching a

sabre. The ribbon from which the medals were suspended was decorated with 13 red-and-white stripes, symbolising the 13 original American colonies. Later, these stripes were swapped out for 13 stars.

In the 1960s, a third version of the medal was created for the Air Force, previous to which it had shared the same Army design. Like the modern-day Army medal, the Air Force's clasp is a rectangle device with the word 'Valor', clutched in an eagle's talons. At the center of the inverted star is the head of the Statue of Liberty, an iconic symbol of the U.S. that did not exist when the original Civil War medal was designed.



*Clockwise from top left: The Navy Medal of Honor, with its anchor embellishments; the U.S. Army version of the Medal of Honor features a triumphant eagle; the U.S. Air Force Medal includes aviator wings backed by thunderbolts*







## The American Civil War

# ALONZO H. CUSHING

At the critical moment of Gettysburg, one man refused to give an inch

WORDS: DAVID A. NORRIS

**M**ore than 12,000 Confederate infantrymen, in a battle line 1.5 miles wide, strode up the long slopes of Cemetery Ridge south of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Breaking the stretch of mostly open farmland near the crest of the ridge was a little clump of trees. From a distance the canopy of summer leaves atop the slender trunks and branches looked like an umbrella.

On July 3, 1863, 'the copse of trees' was the destination of the Confederate advance and the point where they intended to break through the lines of the Union Army. Just a few meters north of the copse waited what was left of Battery A, 4th United States Artillery. A handful of surviving regular artillerymen and some hastily pressed infantry manned the battery's last two serviceable pieces. Losing blood from multiple wounds, 22-year-old battery commander Lieutenant Alonzo H. Cushing peered through his spyglass at the approaching enemy troops. Hoarding his dwindling supply of ammunition, Cushing bade his men load their guns with canister and wait. When the seemingly inexorable enemy line drew within 400 yards, he gave the order to fire.

After defeating Major General Joseph Hooker's Army of the Potomac at the May 1–3 Battle of Chancellorsville, General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia tried to shift the course of the American Civil War with an invasion of the Union state of Pennsylvania. Replacing Hooker on June 28, Major General George Gordon Meade led the Army of the Potomac north through Maryland and into Pennsylvania in pursuit of Lee.

Both armies collided by chance at the southern Pennsylvania town of Gettysburg on July 1. Lee pushed the Union troops out of Gettysburg itself, but they made a stand on

Cemetery Ridge, south of the town. About two miles long, Cemetery Ridge rises about 40 feet above the gently rolling countryside to the west. Shaped something like a fishhook—with the north end curling towards the east—the ridge connected to some higher hills at the north and south ends. Confederate attacks on the ridge continued through July 2 but failed to break Meade's lines.

An all-or-nothing Confederate attack loomed on July 3. This push, known as 'Pickett's Charge' (named for one of the attack's leaders, Major General George Pickett of Virginia), aimed at the Union right on Cemetery Ridge. Lee's infantry attack would bear down upon the section of line held by Major General Winfield Scott Hancock's Second Army Corps.

Anchoring a key section of Hancock's defenses were the six seven-centimeter ordnance rifles of Lieutenant Alonzo Hersford Cushing's Battery A of the 4th United States Artillery. Cushing, an 1861 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, was one of four brothers who served in the Union Army. Most notable of his other siblings was Lieutenant William B. Cushing of the U.S. Navy, famous for daring missions including a commando-style raid that sank the ironclad C.S.S. Albemarle in 1864.

Along the northern part of Cemetery Ridge, a low stone wall, no more than 76 centimeters in height, began west of a woodlot called Ziegler's Grove. This ran south for 258 yards before turning twice into a shape that became known as 'the Angle'.

Inside the stone wall, 100 yards south of the Angle, was a small copse of oak trees. Major Samuel Roberts of the 72nd Pennsylvania described it as "...a clump of saplings, not more than 30 paces in depth" that "...stood out in relief from the ridge and afforded a most

excellent target for the concentrated fire of the enemy's artillery". Between the Angle and the copse was Battery A. Their guns, parked roughly parallel with the line of the main wall from Ziegler's Grove, were about 80 yards from the wall that ran south from the Angle.

During the morning enemy guns sent a sporadic fire against the Union line. About 8 a.m., a shell exploded one of the limbers that belonged to Battery A. Within an instant, two more limbers were detonated by the blast.

At 1 p.m., as the Confederate infantry prepared for their advance, Colonel Edward P. Alexander ordered the assembled artillery of the Confederate Army to open fire on the Union lines. As many as 150 or more rebel guns, answered by about 80 Union cannon, began one of the largest bombardments yet seen during the American Civil War.

Many of the Confederate guns were aimed too high and their projectiles soared over the infantry and landed in the rear. Cushing's Battery, though, took a heavy pounding. Plunging into the Second Corps's artillery positions, shells whistled and shrieked before their explosions wrecked guns, men and horses alike. Some shots struck the walls along the Angle, adding cracked stone shrapnel to the iron fragments that spun through the air. More of Battery A's limbers were hit and their ammunition chests were disintegrated with ground-shaking explosions and clouds of sulphurous smoke.

Lieutenant Cushing was hit early during the bombardment. Wounded in both thighs, he refused to leave the field. Incoming shells continued raising the toll of wrecked guns, dead horses and men in the Second Corps' batteries near the Angle. At 2 p.m. Brigadier General Alexander S. Webb sent for two batteries



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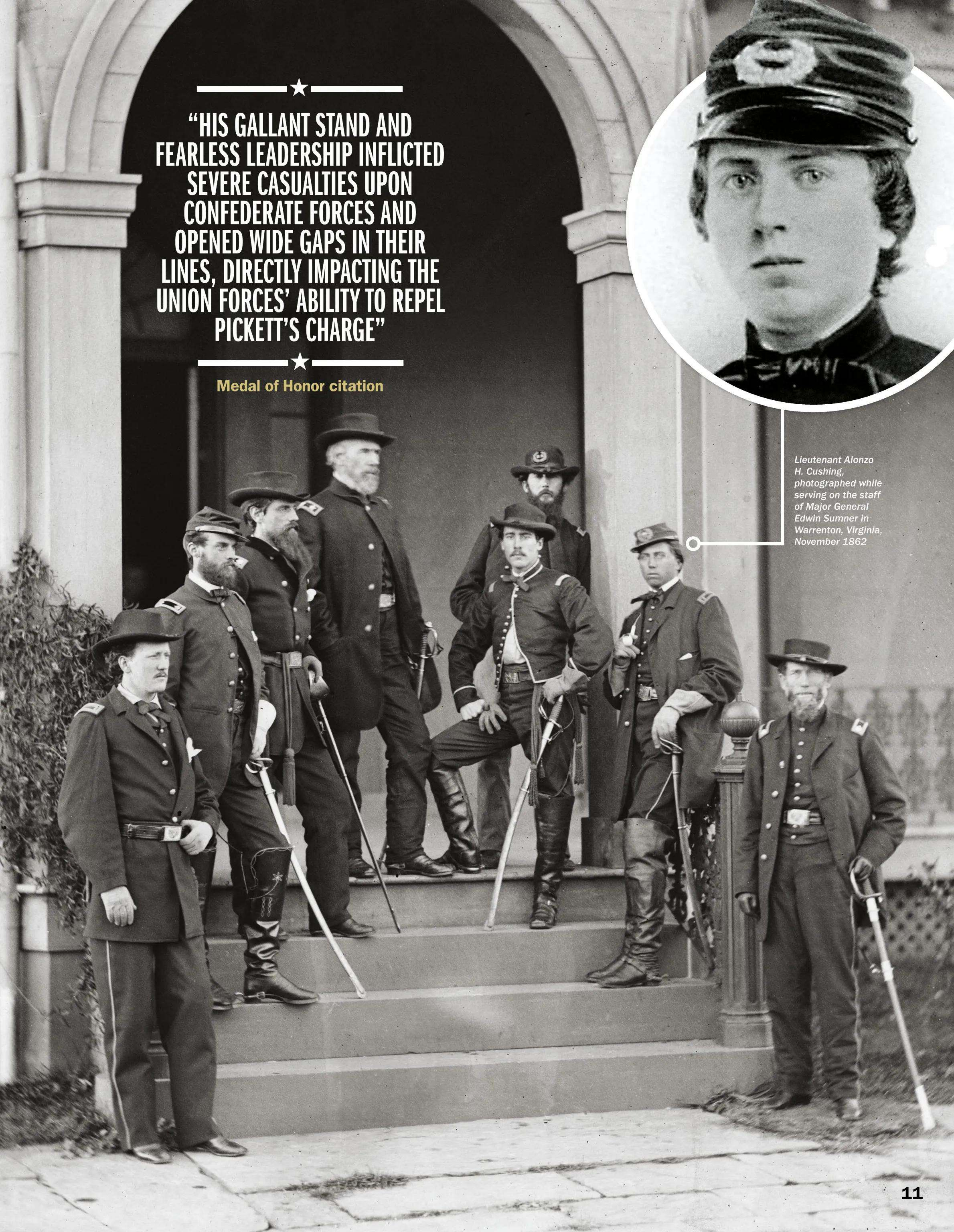
**"HIS GALLANT STAND AND  
FEARLESS LEADERSHIP INFLECTED  
SEVERE CASUALTIES UPON  
CONFEDERATE FORCES AND  
OPENED WIDE GAPS IN THEIR  
LINES, DIRECTLY IMPACTING THE  
UNION FORCES' ABILITY TO REPEL  
PICKETT'S CHARGE"**

★

**Medal of Honor citation**



Lieutenant Alonzo  
H. Cushing,  
photographed while  
serving on the staff  
of Major General  
Edwin Sumner in  
Warrenton, Virginia,  
November 1862

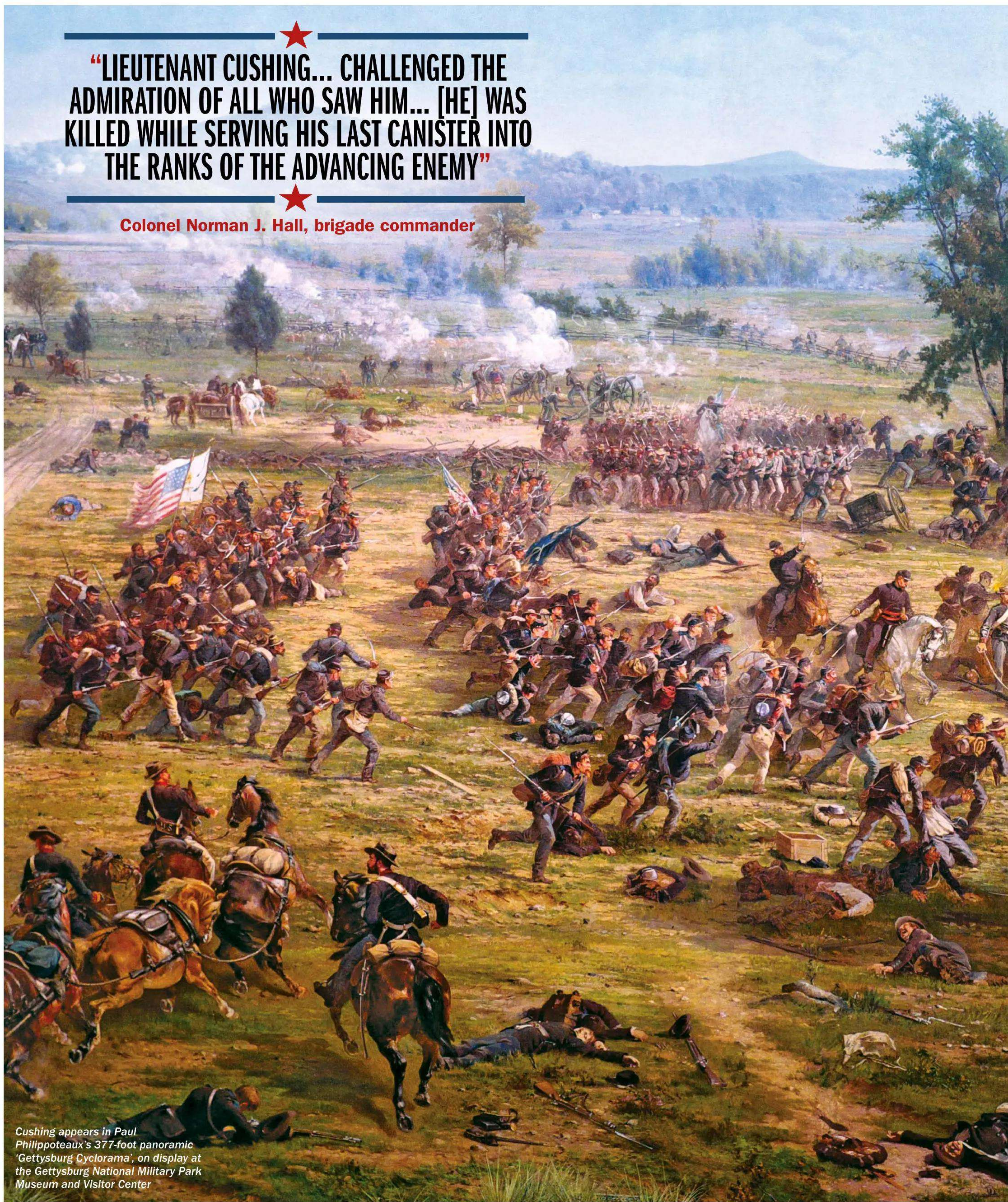




★  
**“LIEUTENANT CUSHING... CHALLENGED THE  
ADMIRATION OF ALL WHO SAW HIM... [HE] WAS  
KILLED WHILE SERVING HIS LAST CANISTER INTO  
THE RANKS OF THE ADVANCING ENEMY”**

★

**Colonel Norman J. Hall, brigade commander**



Cushing appears in Paul Philippoteaux's 377-foot panoramic 'Gettysburg Cyclorama', on display at the Gettysburg National Military Park Museum and Visitor Center





to replace Cushing's unit and a neighboring battery from the 1st Rhode Island Artillery.

By 3 p.m., the Confederate gunners had fired away much of their irreplaceable ammunition. Colonel Alexander saw the enemy fire slacken as some battered Union artillery units pulled back from the ridge. Alexander advised that the infantry must advance now if they were going to move at all. The waiting Confederate generals gave the order and from Cemetery Ridge Union troops spotted more than 12,000 southern infantrymen step into view from the line of woods below. They marched at a steady pace, their officers leading them on a course that threatened to engulf the batteries and regiments around the Angle. If successful, this massive charge would break the Union line on Cemetery Ridge and perhaps do the same to the Army of the Potomac and the Union's war effort.

A fresh New York battery arrived to fill the gap left by the Rhode Islanders to Cushing's right, but there were no replacements for Cushing by the time the Confederate advance was visible. The lieutenant had only enough men left to work two guns, and this was only possible by borrowing infantrymen from Webb's brigade. To confront the oncoming wave of rebel infantry, Battery A's two serviceable pieces were pushed forward to the stone wall, leaving a few yards of space ahead of the muzzles for the gunners to load the pieces.

Behind the wall was Company I of the 69th Pennsylvania. The foot soldiers were ordered to open a gap for the guns, but before the Pennsylvanians could move aside, one of the guns accidentally discharged and blasted through Company I, killing two men.

When the rebels were within 400 yards of the Angle, Battery A began firing canister at the enemy. A shot hit Cushing's right shoulder, tearing off his epaulet.

Pushing up the slope, the Confederates were pelted by heavy musket and cannon fire, but pressed on to within 200 yards. Cushing's gunners now loaded double servings of canister. With a lanyard wrapped around his wrist, the lieutenant continued to fire one of his guns. Corporal Thomas Moon later recalled that by this time, the lieutenant's "right thumb was burned to the bone, serving vent without a thumbpad".

A moment later, the young lieutenant was hit once again. Bleeding profusely from serious wounds to his abdomen and groin, he was forced to hold his intestines in. Sergeant Frederick Fuger helped the indomitable officer to stand. Refusing Fuger's plea to leave the field, Cushing told him, "No. I stay right here and fight it out or die in the attempt."

When the enemy closed to within 100 yards of Battery A's guns, a Minié ball entered Cushing's mouth and tore out through the back of his skull. He died instantly. Fuger caught the lieutenant's body as he fell.

Led by Brigadier General Lewis Armistead, several score Confederate soldiers stepped over the wall and poured onto the ground surrounding the empty guns of Cushing's battery. This surge, known as 'the high-water mark of the Confederacy', marked the furthest advance of the southern infantry at Gettysburg.

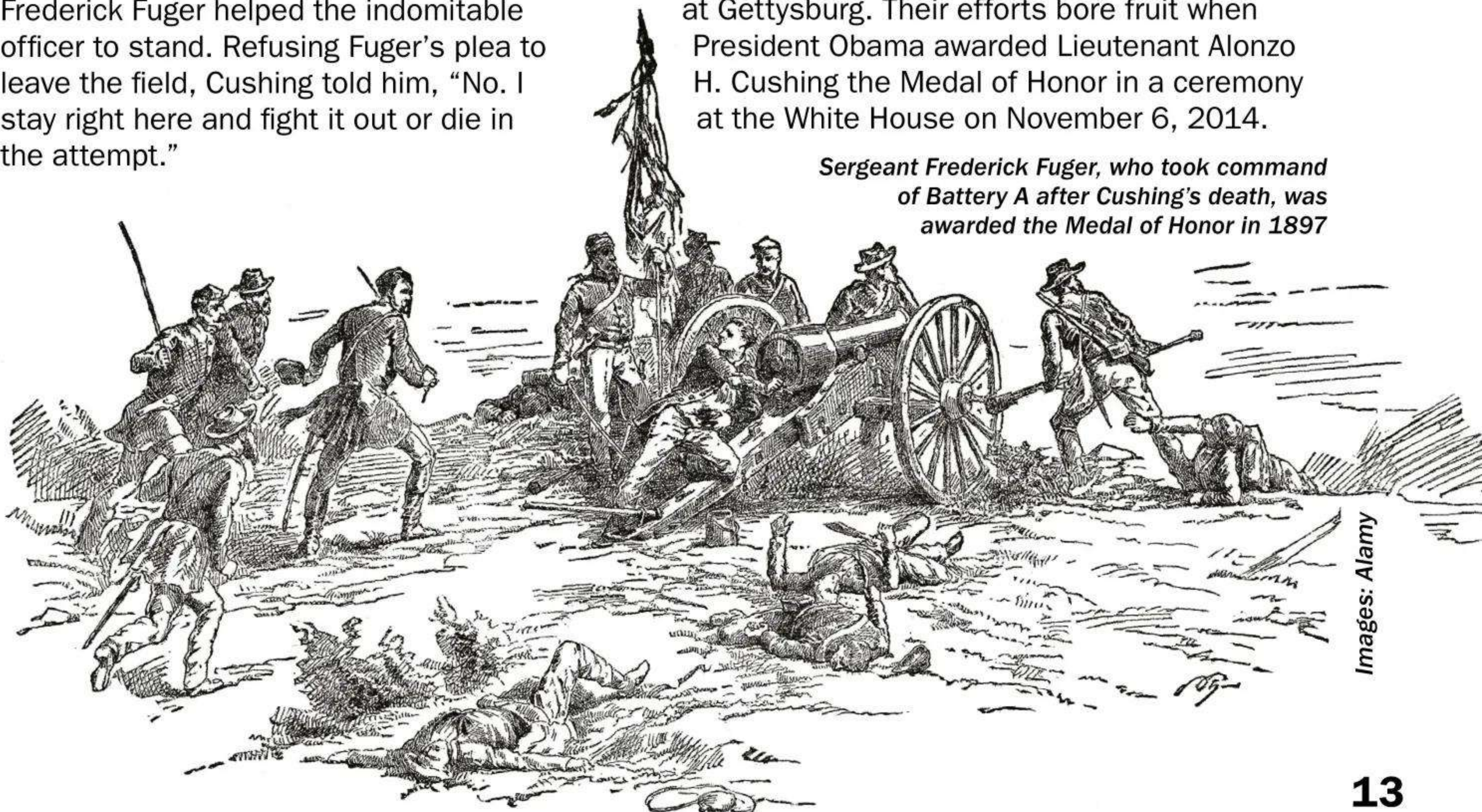
Armistead was mortally wounded as he laid his hand on the gun that Cushing had just fired for the last time. He fell only a few paces from the spot where Cushing died. Faced with the unrelenting loads of canister fired by Cushing and the neighboring batteries, plus the supporting musket fire of the Union infantry, only a small number of Confederates reached the Angle. Union soldiers rallied in greater numbers and stopped the southern push. The Confederates who were not shot down or captured were pushed back down the long slope to their original line.

Cemetery Ridge remained in Union hands. One day later, Lee ordered a retreat back toward Virginia. His army had escaped, but it would never again be able to mount such an aggressive offensive campaign.

Cushing's Battery paid heavily for their prominent role in the repulse of the Confederate attack of July 3. One officer of the battery was wounded; Cushing and the only other officer were both dead. Seven enlisted men were dead and 38 wounded. Sergeant Fuger noted that nine of the battery's ammunition chests were blown up by enemy artillery and "not a sound wheel was left" on the guns. Only seven of the battery's 90 horses were still alive.

Cushing was honored with a posthumous promotion to lieutenant colonel. However, nearly 150 years would pass before Lieutenant Cushing received the Medal of Honor. Created in 1862, the medal was intended to recognize the exceptional bravery of enlisted personnel on the battlefield. In the 1860s, officers were typically recognized for valor with regular or brevet (honorary) promotions. Cushing was not forgotten, though. In the late 1980s, lawmakers and citizens of Wisconsin, Cushing's native state, began a campaign for a posthumous presentation of the medal to officially recognize Cushing's exceptional role at Gettysburg. Their efforts bore fruit when President Obama awarded Lieutenant Alonzo H. Cushing the Medal of Honor in a ceremony at the White House on November 6, 2014.

*Sergeant Frederick Fuger, who took command of Battery A after Cushing's death, was awarded the Medal of Honor in 1897*







## The American Civil War

# DR MARY EDWARDS WALKER

One of the first women in the U.S. to earn a medical degree, Doctor Walker put herself in harm's way to contribute her skills to the Union war effort

WORDS: DAVID A. NORRIS

**K**eeping a watchful eye out for the enemy, Confederate pickets caught an unusual prisoner just south of the Tennessee-Georgia border on April 10, 1864. The prisoner was a young woman dressed in a strange, feminised version of a Union Army officer's uniform. She surprised the pickets and their superior officers by announcing that they had just captured Mary E. Walker, MD, the assistant surgeon of the 52nd Ohio Infantry.

Unique among the Union Army's surgeons, Walker was an 1855 graduate of the Syracuse Medical College and one of the first women in the U.S. to earn a medical degree. She shared a practice with her husband, Albert, who was also a physician, until his infidelities eventually led to their divorce.

In 1861, Doctor Walker gave up private practice to seek a commission in the Union Army as a military surgeon. She was refused such an appointment, and in turn, she rejected employment as a volunteer nurse. But an opportunity would arise later that year.

Surgeon J.N. Green was overwhelmed after the death of his assistant surgeon at the Indiana Hospital, a temporary army medical facility squeezed into the U.S. Patent Office building in Washington, DC. Green accepted the unconventional Doctor Walker on his staff, but he was unable to obtain a commission or any pay for his new colleague. When Green offered to share his pay, Doctor Walker refused because she knew Green needed the money to support his own family.

Later as a volunteer, Doctor Walker assisted medical officers to treat wounded soldiers at field hospitals in Virginia, including during the aftermath of the Battle of Fredericksburg, fought from December 11–15, 1862. However, tracing her exact movements in this period is

difficult because military records include little notice of volunteer medical workers.

In September 1863, Doctor Walker obtained official status, partly through the consent of Major General George H. Thomas. She was hired as a contract acting assistant surgeon and attached to the Army of the Cumberland in Tennessee. Contract surgeons were temporarily hired by the army and received officer's pay, but instead of receiving commissions they remained civilians.

For a time, Walker was attached to the 52nd Ohio Infantry. Evidently, she was a replacement for the regiment's assistant surgeon, who died from an overdose of morphine.

While on duty she wore a uniform of her own design. Over a pair of trousers, she wore a calf-length dress that resembled an officer's frock coat with military-style buttons. The doctor regarded her clothing as practical and efficient. Although this was a very modest outfit by today's liberal standards, her choice of costume shocked and angered most of her 1860s contemporaries.

Reflecting her status within the regiment, Doctor Walker also wore the green sash that designated army surgeons and a felt hat with military insignia and a plume. Her only official status was through her contract, but she considered herself to be an assistant surgeon on duty with the 52nd Ohio, and she typically signed her name as "Mary E Walker, MD," sometimes adding the rank of major.

The health of the 52nd Ohio's rank and file was good, and the medical officers had little to do. Few soldiers knew what to make of such an unusual doctor, and many of them disliked her because of her precedent-breaking role as an army doctor. Some soldiers in the regiment suspected she was a spy, and others believed she was the colonel's mistress. Long after the

war, Nixon B. Stewart, a sergeant in the 52nd, wrote a regimental history. Stewart wrote that during the war, "The men seemed to hate her, and she did little or nothing for the sick of the regiment." He was more reflective when looking back from the vantage point of the year 1900: "We believe she was honest and sincere in her views, posing as a reformer, yet the majority of the men in the regiment believed she was out of her place in the army."

A conspicuous sight in her uniform, Doctor Walker frequently rode out of camp. It appeared that she was visiting poor families on both sides of the lines. She claimed that her visits to needy families of absent Confederate soldiers helped to win over local residents to support the Union, but there is some indication that she took these rides to gather intelligence on the enemy. It's possible that, in part, the army brass appointed her as an assistant surgeon so she could use her unique status as a cover for spying.

On April 10, 1864, Doctor Walker was stopped by Confederate pickets near Tunnel Hill, Georgia. Her captors were surprised at her unconventional attire. The *Macon Daily Confederate* reported that "she was riding a man's saddle, with one foot in each stirrup! Oh, my! Goodness gracious!"

She tried to talk her way out of the situation, explaining to the skeptical soldiers that she wanted to mail some letters into the Confederacy for friends within the Union lines. Placed under arrest as a suspected spy, she was escorted to Virginia by a staff officer. Upon her arrival in Richmond on April 21, the 'female Yankee surgeon' was sent to Castle Thunder, a military prison that held civilian inmates.

The capture of this 'Yankee doctress' was widely covered in Union and Confederate newspapers, and she was willing to joust with



**“DOCTOR MARY E. WALKER WAS THE FIRST, AND REMAINS THE ONLY, WOMAN AWARDED THE MEDAL OF HONOR FOR HER CONTRIBUTIONS TO MILITARY MEDICINE AND SELFLESS ACTIONS DURING THE CIVIL WAR”**

**Senate Resolution 441, Recognizing the History and Continued Accomplishments of Women in the Armed Forces of the United States, March 4, 2010**

*In 1866, Doctor Mary Walker became the first and only woman to hold the Medal of Honor. Here she is pictured wearing the medal with a version of the uniform she wore on military duty*



**Left:** Often criticized or arrested for her appearance, Mary is quoted to have said, “I don’t wear men’s clothes, I wear my own clothes”



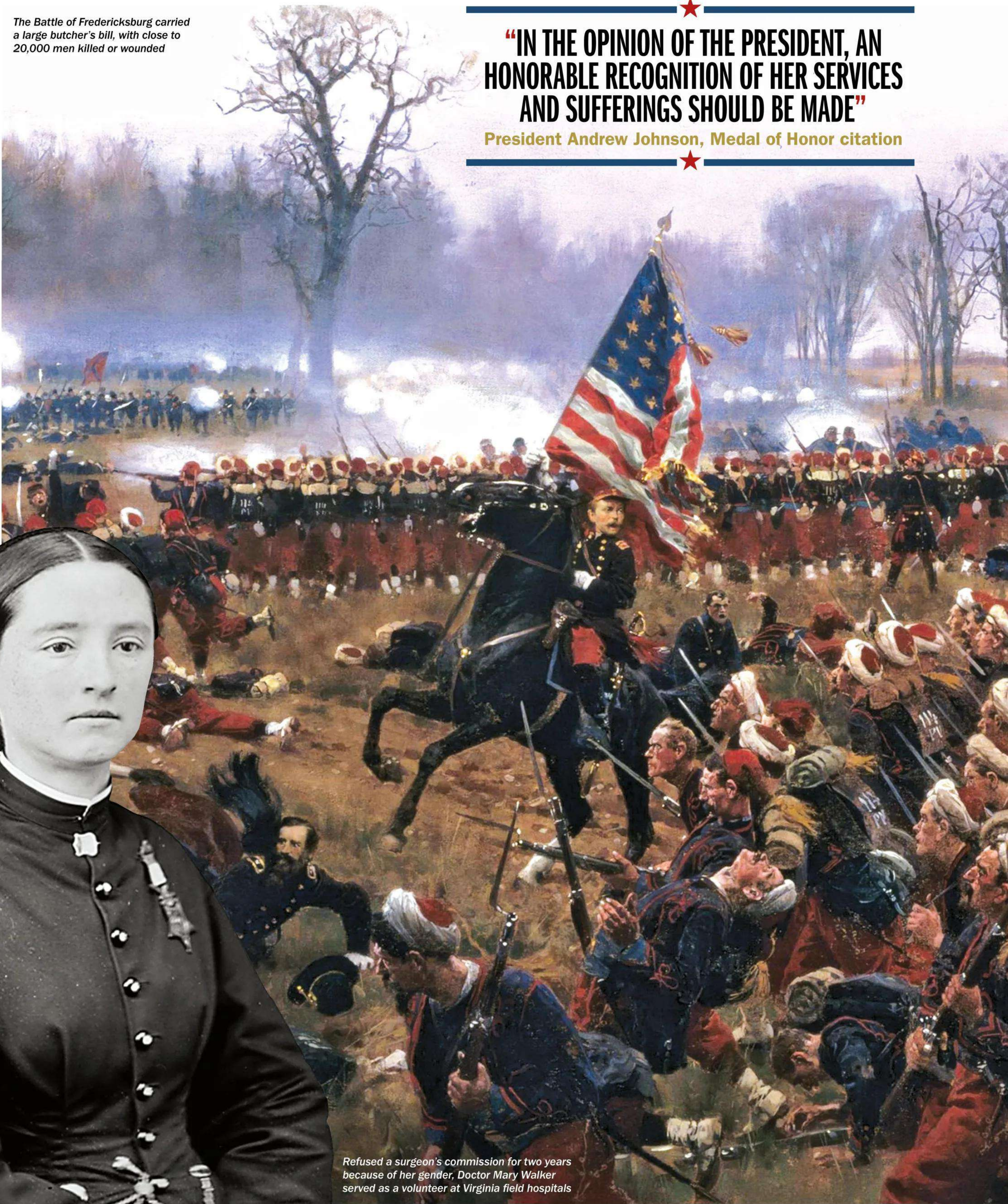




*The Battle of Fredericksburg carried a large butcher's bill, with close to 20,000 men killed or wounded*

**"IN THE OPINION OF THE PRESIDENT, AN HONORABLE RECOGNITION OF HER SERVICES AND SUFFERINGS SHOULD BE MADE"**

**President Andrew Johnson, Medal of Honor citation**



*Refused a surgeon's commission for two years because of her gender, Doctor Mary Walker served as a volunteer at Virginia field hospitals*





her critics public. On the day that she arrived in Richmond she wrote to the *Richmond Dispatch*: "Will you please correct the statement you made in this morning's Dispatch, in regard to my being 'dressed in male attire.' I am attired in what is usually called the 'bloomer' or 'reform dress', which is similar to other ladies, with the exception of its being shorter and more physiological than long dresses."

Apparently it took some time for the Confederate authorities to decide how to handle the case. After four months in prison, Doctor Walker was exchanged for a captive Confederate Army surgeon. The *Richmond Dispatch* reported on August 13, "When Miss Doctor Walker emerged from the confines of the castle, she gave vent to an audible huzzah, and raising her hat from her head made an obeisance to the officers of the prison." For the rest of her life, she proudly regarded herself as the first female POW to be exchanged for a military officer.

After her release she was appointed medical director of the hospital for female inmates of the Louisville Military Prison in Kentucky. Then she was transferred to an orphanage in Nashville, Tennessee, until her Federal contract expired on June 15, 1865.

After the war ended Doctor Walker continued to seek a permanent spot as a military surgeon. Severe post-war cutbacks limited the need for army doctors, and the Medical Department was unwilling to find her a new post. As a civilian she was ineligible for an honorary brevet officer promotion, but there remained the possibility of a Medal of Honor to reward Doctor Walker for her wartime services.

By 1865, ambiguous standards had led to some unusual presentations of the Medal of Honor. Many soldiers received the medal after capturing an enemy flag, but several awards were made to lucky soldiers who simply picked up lost flags they found after a battle. 29 soldiers who served as President Lincoln's funeral guard received the medal. Medals were offered to every soldier in the 27th Maine as an inducement to re-enlist, and because of a clerical error all 864 men of the regiment received the Medal of Honor, whether or not they re-enlisted.

Doctor Walker's medal citation, given by President Andrew Johnson on November 11, 1865, explained in part, "By reason of her not being a commissioned officer in the

military service, a brevet or honorary rank cannot, under existing laws, be conferred upon her. Whereas in the opinion of the president, an honorable recognition of her services and sufferings should be made. It is ordered, that a testimonial thereof shall be hereby made and given to the said Doctor Mary E Walker, and that the usual Medal of Honor for meritorious services be given her."

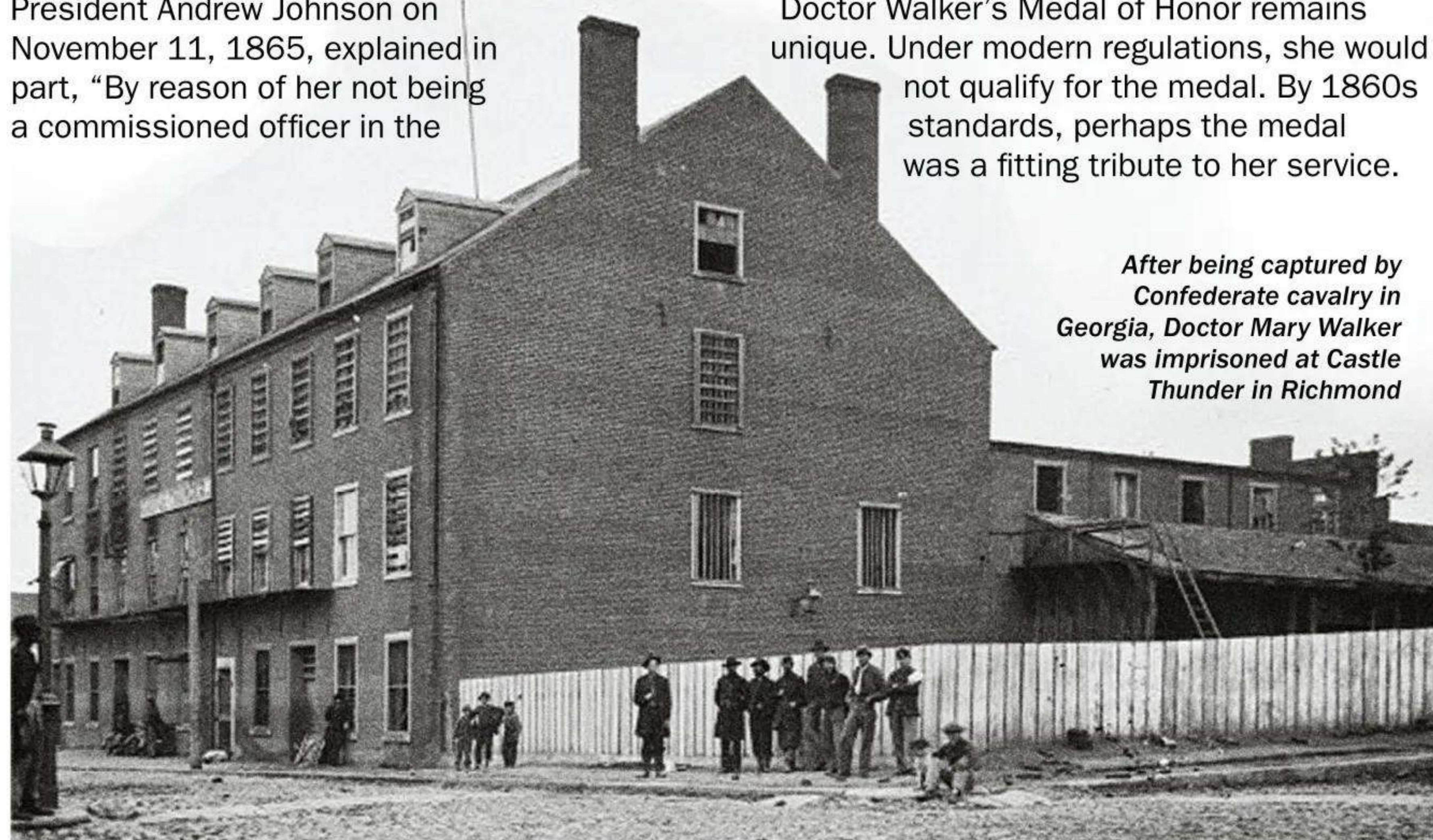
Doctor Walker continued to write and lecture on women's rights and campaigned against alcohol and tobacco. For more than 50 years she attracted much attention in the press for her insistence on dress reform. Late in life she often dressed in men's attire, including a Prince Albert coat and a top hat.

Poor health plagued Doctor Walker after the war. Due to vision problems attributed to her four months spent as a prisoner of war, she was granted an invalid pension in 1873. She was one of very few women who received U.S. military pensions for active service as opposed to being a widow or dependent of a fallen soldier before the 20th century.

Congress revised the standards for the Medal of Honor in 1916. The Army was ordered to revoke any medals found to have been awarded, "...for any cause other than distinguished conduct in action involving actual conflict with an enemy". 2,625 cases were reviewed, and 911 medals that did not meet the new standards were rescinded in 1917. Among the disavowed medals were those of the 27th Maine, the Lincoln funeral guard, and Doctor Mary Walker. In her case, the War Department found nothing, "...in the records to show the specific act or acts for which the decoration was originally awarded". She refused to return the medal and continued to wear it until she died in 1919 at the age of 86.

In 1977, Army Secretary Clifford L. Alexander, Jr., following the recommendation of the Army Board for the Correction of Military Records, restored Doctor Mary Walker's Medal of Honor. UPI reported that the review board stated that the officers who rescinded the medal in 1917, "...may have erred, although there was no one particular act of heroism". The 1977 review found, "...ample evidence to show distinguished gallantry at the risk of life in the face of the enemy."

Doctor Walker's Medal of Honor remains unique. Under modern regulations, she would not qualify for the medal. By 1860s standards, perhaps the medal was a fitting tribute to her service.



After being captured by Confederate cavalry in Georgia, Doctor Mary Walker was imprisoned at Castle Thunder in Richmond



Stealing two enemy flags  
just three days apart,  
Tom Custer was the first  
person to be awarded  
two Medals of Honor

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★

**“YOU MIGHT THINK  
THAT TOM LACKS  
CAUTION, JUDGEMENT.  
ON THE CONTRARY HE  
POSSESSED BOTH TO AN  
UNUSUAL DEGREE. HIS  
EXCELLENT JUDGEMENT  
TELLS HIM WHEN TO  
PRESS THE ENEMY, AND  
WHEN TO BE MODERATE”**

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**George Custer**





## The American Civil War

# THOMAS CUSTER

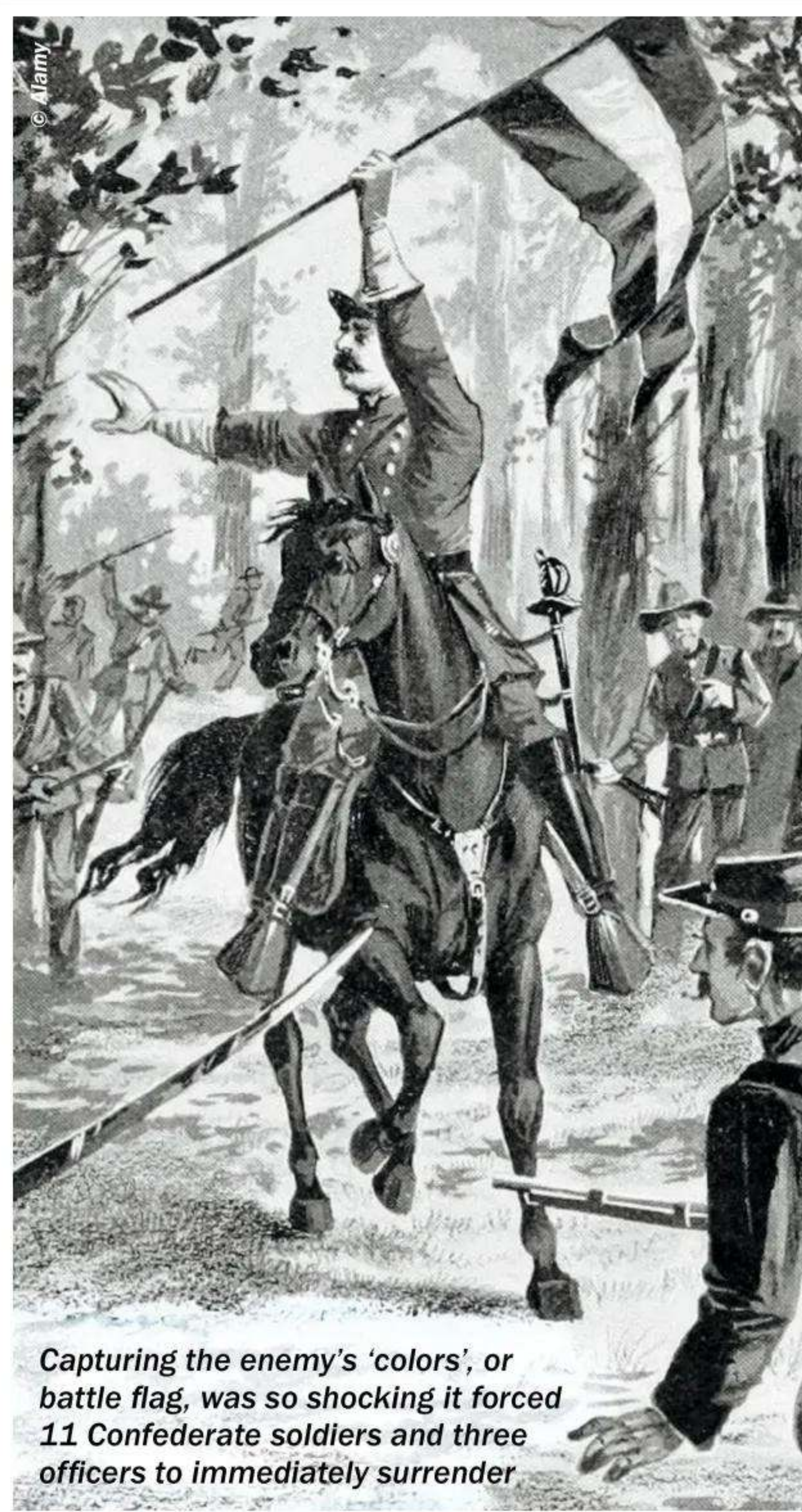
While George may be the most famous—or infamous—Custer, after risking his life to capture two Confederate flags in the thick of battle, his younger brother Tom was arguably the most beloved

WORDS: HARETH AL BUSTANI

**A**ged just 16 when the U.S. Civil War broke out in 1861, Thomas Ward Custer was too young to enlist. However, eager to fight alongside his celebrated older brother George for the Union, he simply lied about his age and joined the 21st Ohio Volunteer Infantry. As the country was torn apart he fought against the Confederate South in Tennessee and Georgia before being promoted to second lieutenant and serving in the 6th Michigan Cavalry in Virginia—on the staff of his brigadier-general brother.

By April 1865, two years after the Battle of Gettysburg, the Union Army—also known as the Federal Army—outnumbered the Confederates by 112,000 soldiers to 58,400 and was close to victory. After a nine-month siege, the Confederate ‘rebel’ army was forced to flee its capital of Richmond and the neighboring stronghold of Petersburg in Virginia. With his supply lines shattered and his army spread across a wide arc, the Confederate General Robert E. Lee retreated towards Amelia Court House. There he hoped to regroup and resupply before linking up with Joseph E. Johnston in North Carolina.

With the Union hot on their heels, the Confederates crossed Namozine Creek, felling trees to slow down their pursuers and positioning their men behind breastworks along the west bank. As the Federal troops approached the opposite bank, gunshots



*Capturing the enemy's 'colors', or battle flag, was so shocking it forced 11 Confederate soldiers and three officers to immediately surrender*

exploded from the woods beyond. The Union army responded with artillery fire, creating enough space for one group of skirmishers to engage the enemy from the river's edge while another dismounted, forded the river downstream and attacked the enemy flank. Desperate to buy time, 800 Confederate soldiers mounted a last-ditch rearguard defense, fortifying positions at the intersection of three roads behind the Namozine Presbyterian Church.

Advancing towards the church, the Federal troops spotted the Confederates dug in behind their entrenchments—some hiding in out-buildings, others behind an old fence and makeshift breastworks. After briefly being pushed back, the Union troops regrouped and prepared for the attack. Dressed in his red neck tie, Tom watched on as his men beat back an attempted rebel counterattack and stampeded their horses. With the cavalry preparing to charge, Tom rode to the front of the brigade and joined in. Hurling caution to the wind, he throttled onwards at full gallop, leaping over the barricade under heavy gunfire.

As the shell-shocked Confederates scattered before him, Tom spotted the 2nd North Carolina Cavalry's color-bearer. The colors (a flag or standard) were a powerful force on the battlefield—when consumed by chaos or fear, it was the regimental flag that Civil War soldiers turned to for order. It symbolized the regiment's honor; if the flag





advanced or fell back, the men were expected to follow. It was a prestigious—and very risky—duty to wield it.

His steed punctured by bullets, Tom pressed on, wrenching the flag from its bearer and hoisting it high while screaming for the soldiers around him to surrender. Shocked and humiliated, the 11 Confederate troops and three officers complied. Having lost just three men, with 15 wounded, the Union captured 350 Confederate soldiers alongside 100 horses and a canon. Among those taken was Brigadier-General Rufus Barringer, who was led away ‘to safety’ by Union forces.

The next morning, a proud George wrote to his wife telling her about the brave actions of his “most gallant” brother: “Tom is always in the advance. He will go to Washington with his captured flag when the trophies are sent there. He will receive 30 days leave and a Medal of Honor.”

As the broken Confederates desperately tried to regroup things continued to go from bad to worse. The disruption in their

★  
**“THERE WAS IN THE  
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EVER CHARACTERIZED  
THE CUSTERS”**  
★

**Charles Windolph, Medal of Honor  
recipient and Little Bighorn survivor**

lines of communication meant an expected supply of 300,000 rations would not be coming to Amelia Court House. Forced to send his men out to forage for food while he awaited reinforcements, Lee lost a crucial day’s march. Over the next two days the Union army continued to chase down the increasingly desperate, hungry and exhausted Confederates before catching up with them for a final engagement at Sailor’s Creek.

As they set off on the morning of April 6, Tom and his comrades were tired, but they knew the enemy was close. Within an hour they caught up with the Confederate rear and began fighting towards Sailor’s Creek. Spotting a Confederate battery preparing to fire, Tom and George sent in the cavalry, who swiftly captured 800 men, 300 wagons and nine canons.

Having crossed the creek at two separate locations, the Confederate ranks were becoming increasingly chaotic. While Lieutenant General Richard S. Ewell lined his corps along the west bank of Sailor’s Creek,

*Tom died fighting alongside  
his brothers George and  
Boston at the Battle of  
Little Bighorn in 1876*

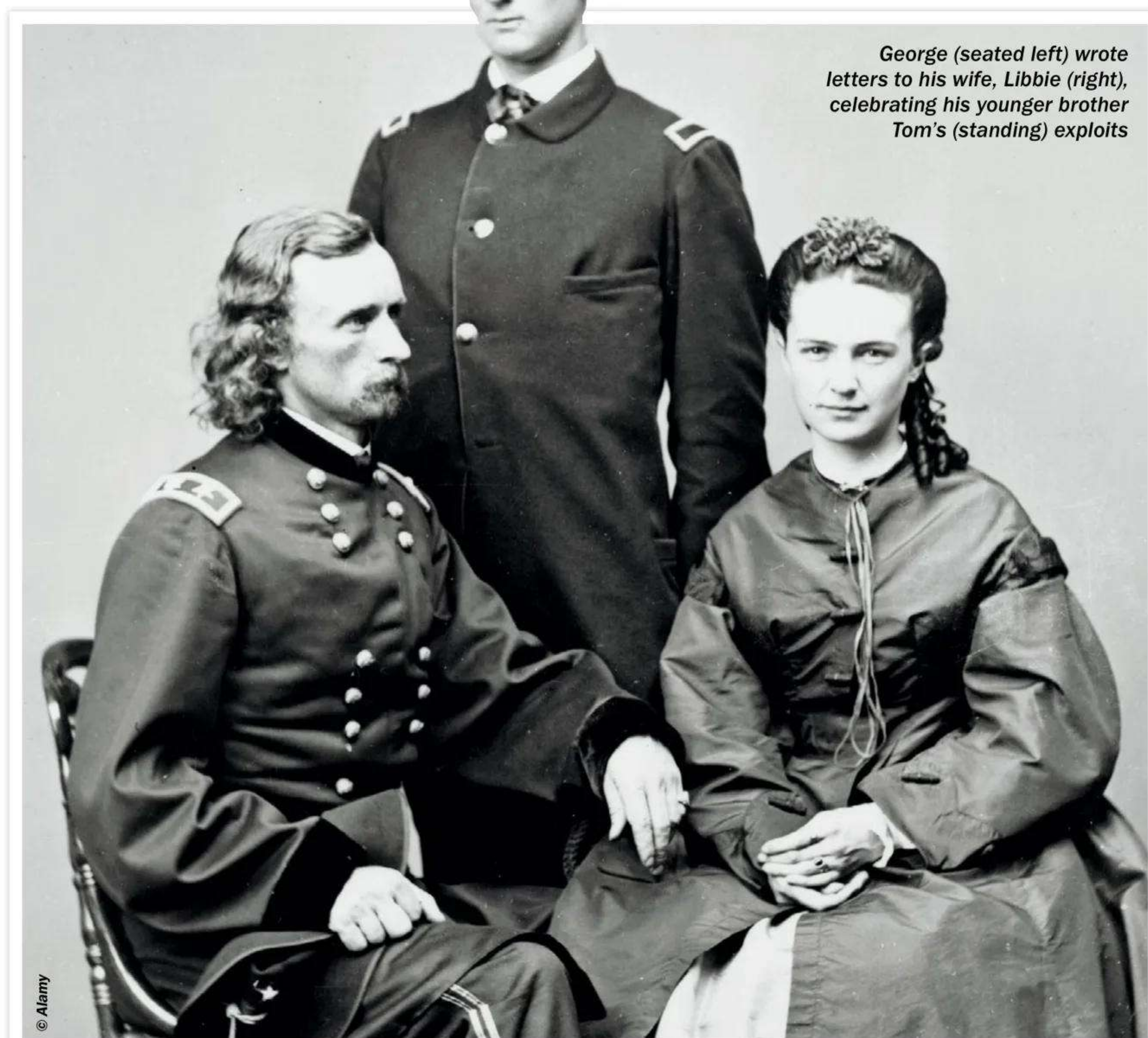




Lieutenant General Richard H. Anderson occupied the high ground along Danville Road.

When the Federal artillery began hammering Ewell's position that evening with their own artillery and ordnance they had captured, the Confederates had no response. Half an hour later the Union infantry rushed towards Little Sailor's Creek, pushing the enemy back and waving handkerchiefs at them as if to goad them into surrender. However, after heavy rainfall the river was deep and swampy and difficult to cross. As the Federal troops emerged on the other side they were repelled with well-timed volleys fired from behind the Confederate breastwork.

Brigadier-General Truman Seymour later said, "The Confederate Marine Battalion fought with peculiar obstinacy." Some rebels even launched a counterattack, pushing the Federal soldiers back into the creek in hand-to-hand combat. Things quickly grew more vicious. Confederate Major Robert Stiles recalled, "The battle degenerated into a butchery of brutal personal conflicts. I saw...



George (seated left) wrote letters to his wife, Libbie (right), celebrating his younger brother Tom's (standing) exploits

men kill each other with bayonets and the butts of muskets, and even bite each other's throats and ears and noses, rolling on the ground like wild beasts."

Meanwhile, Tom and his brother chased after Anderson, who had decided to mount a stand at a crossroads further south. With the Union in pursuit, the Confederates tore down fences and erected barricades in the mud as the fields behind filled with Federal cavalry. With their marching band hitting the field, the Federals prepared to strike—with Colonel Capeheart's cavalry leading the charge. Tom once again burst through like a man possessed, riding to the head of the cavalry. Both sides could sense a defining moment was at hand. This battle was even more desperate than Namozine; more claustrophobic, more violent.

Under a hail of bullets, Tom roared "Charge!" and darted forwards, leaping the enemy barricade without a moment's hesitation. This time, as he landed, he found himself surrounded by enemy soldiers and began firing his pistol wildly from left to right, frantically dispersing them. But as the Confederates began to regroup, he spotted the red-and-white banner flapping, adorned with the Confederate stars and bars.

He darted towards the standard bearer, who pulled out his pistol and fired, striking Tom in the face and knocking him backwards on his horse. The bullet ripped through his right cheek and out beneath his right ear, narrowly missing an artery. As agony seared through his face, Tom dragged himself upright, blood streaming down his neck, and hurtled forth—tearing the flag from the color-bearer and shooting him in the heart.

Seeing Tom riding back, covered in blood and waving the enemy colors, one of his comrades yelled, "For God's sake, Tom, furl that flag or they'll fire on you!" Tom handed the flag to an aide and roared to his brother, "The damned rebels have shot me, but I've got my flag!" With Tom refusing to see the medic, George had to have him arrested and dragged back to the rear to keep him away from the battle.

Before long the Confederate lines were utterly overwhelmed, sending the soldiers fleeing into the woods. Dubbed the 'Black Thursday of the Confederacy', the battle cost the rebels nearly 10,000 soldiers, which amounted to a fifth of Lee's remaining troops. As Lee surveyed the aftermath, he remarked, "My God, has the army dissolved?" Not even he could recover from this. Just three days later he surrendered.

The celebrations would be short-lived. On April 14, less than a week later, President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. Ten days later, at a solemn ceremony, Tom and others received the first-ever Medals of Honor. Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, thanked them for their bravery: "It is with profound grief that I cannot return to you the thanks of the late President." The next month, on May 22, Tom became the first man to receive a second Medal of Honor. Remarkably, his two acts of bravery were separated by just three days.

After the war Tom joined George's 7th Cavalry, where the two served together from 1866 to 1876, patrolling the Western Plains. They were both killed, alongside 220 other soldiers and their brother, Boston, fighting Sioux and Cheyenne warriors at Little Big Horn. Their deaths would be immortalized as Custer's Last Stand.





## The American Civil War

# WILLIAM HARVEY CARNEY

When the color guard of the 54th Regiment was killed, this sergeant, although wounded, seized the national flag and marched it forward during the storming of Fort Wagner in Charleston, South Carolina

WORDS: MURRAY DAHM

**O**n September 22, 1862, almost two years into the U.S. Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, stating that, as of January 1, 1863, all slaves within any State would be “thenceforward, and forever free”. This proclamation freed 3.5 million men and women of African-American descent and included in the proclamation was the sentence that “the executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom”. This meant that African-Americans could serve in the armed forces of the Union.

The first unit that took advantage of the new-won ability of African-American men to serve in Union armies was the 1st Kansas Colored Infantry Regiment, which mustered less than two weeks after the Emancipation Proclamation came into effect, on January 13. This unit was formed without the authority (and against the wishes) of the Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. The second unit to form, the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, was sanctioned, and it began recruiting on January 26. Stanton had instructed the Governor of Massachusetts,

John A. Andrew, to begin raising the regiment, which would be commanded and led by white officers. The commander would be Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, only son of a prominent Boston abolitionist family, who was personally selected by Governor Andrew.

Immense efforts were undertaken to ensure that enough men would come forward to serve, but it soon became clear that many more men than were required were intending to sign up. A medical exam was therefore instituted, and the men of the 54th were described as “strong, robust and healthy”, more so than any other unit in the Union army. Among the men who were recruited and who passed the physical was William Harvey Carney of New Bedford, Massachusetts.

Carney was born a slave in Norfolk, Virginia, in late February 1840. According to several biographies he escaped to freedom via the Underground Railway and joined his father in Massachusetts, who had escaped some time earlier. It is possible the two then purchased the freedom of the rest of their family. It is also possible that the young William had his freedom purchased by his father. In February 1863, just before his 23rd birthday, Carney joined the 54th.

In answer to the growing realization that the Emancipation Proclamation would mean units of African-American troops coming up against the Confederacy, its president, Jefferson Davis,

issued a proclamation of his own on December 23, 1862. This stated that all African-American soldiers and the officers commanding them should be considered criminals assisting in servile insurrection and were thereby condemned to death. This proclamation did nothing to slow the numbers of men coming forward to serve in the new units, however.

The 54th trained at Camp Meigs in Readville near Boston. It mustered into service on May 13, 1863, leaving Boston on May 28. It would not have to wait long before it saw action.

The 54th marched to Beaufort, South Carolina, where they were joined by another African-American unit, the 2nd South Carolina Volunteer Infantry Regiment. The 2nd had already mounted successful raids in early June. The first battle for the 54th came on July 16, 1863, at Grimball’s Landing on James Island as part of the Operations Against the Defenses of Charlestown. The action at Grimball’s Landing was intended to draw troops away from Fort Wagner, which Brigadier General Quincy A. Gilmore had failed to take on the 11th. Fort Wagner was the real objective of the campaign. At Grimball’s landing, the 54th prevented an encircling movement by Confederate forces and allowed the withdrawal of the 10th Connecticut Infantry Regiment, who the Confederates had sought to surround and cut off.

The 54th was blooded, suffering 43 casualties. The regiment was selected to lead



William Harvey Carney  
c.1901, after his Medal  
of Honor was awarded by  
fellow Civil War veteran  
President McKinley

**“WHEN THE COLOR SERGEANT  
WAS SHOT DOWN, THIS  
SOLDIER GRASPED THE  
FLAG, LED THE WAY TO THE  
PARAPET, AND PLANTED  
THE COLORS THEREON.  
WHEN THE TROOPS FELL  
BACK HE BROUGHT OFF THE  
FLAG, UNDER A FIERCE FIRE  
IN WHICH HE WAS TWICE  
SEVERELY WOUNDED”**

Medal of Honor citation





the charge against Fort Wagner in Charleston, South Carolina, on July 18, 1863, at the Second Battle of Fort Wagner. Some accounts have Colonel Shaw requesting to lead the charge with the 54th.

The first unsuccessful assault on the fort (the first battle) had taken place a week earlier. Fort Wagner protected the strategically important Morris Island, which protected the southern approaches to Charleston Harbor. The fort was located on a narrow island, which allowed assault by only one regiment at a time. The approach to the fort consisted of a strip of beach only 60 yards wide; on the east was the sea, with marsh on the west. As this strip opened out, it faced the more than 220-yard-wide parapet of the fort, which consisted of a moat with sharpened stakes and abatis (felled trees). The fort was strongly protected with artillery pieces consisting of mortars, howitzers and carronades and a strong infantry garrison of 1,800 men. Gilmore had underestimated the strength of the garrison, which could bring many men and their guns against the thin fronts of his assaulting regiments. Gilmore had his own land and sea artillery (the latter supplied by six Monitor gunships); with these he began an eight-hour bombardment of the fort. It was ineffective, inflicting only 28 casualties.

At dusk the 54th advanced to lead the assault on the fort, led by Colonel Shaw and cheered by the remaining nine regiments of

★  
**“BOYS, I ONLY DID MY DUTY;  
THE OLD FLAG NEVER TOUCHED  
THE GROUND!”**  
★

**William H. Carney, July 18, 1863**

Gilmore’s command. Some 5,000 men in total would come on in three brigades, all led by the 54th. The 54th would spearhead the attack towards the west end of the fort while it was intended that the remainder of the first brigade would attack the seaward salient. The assault was launched at 7.45 p.m., 45 minutes before sunset.

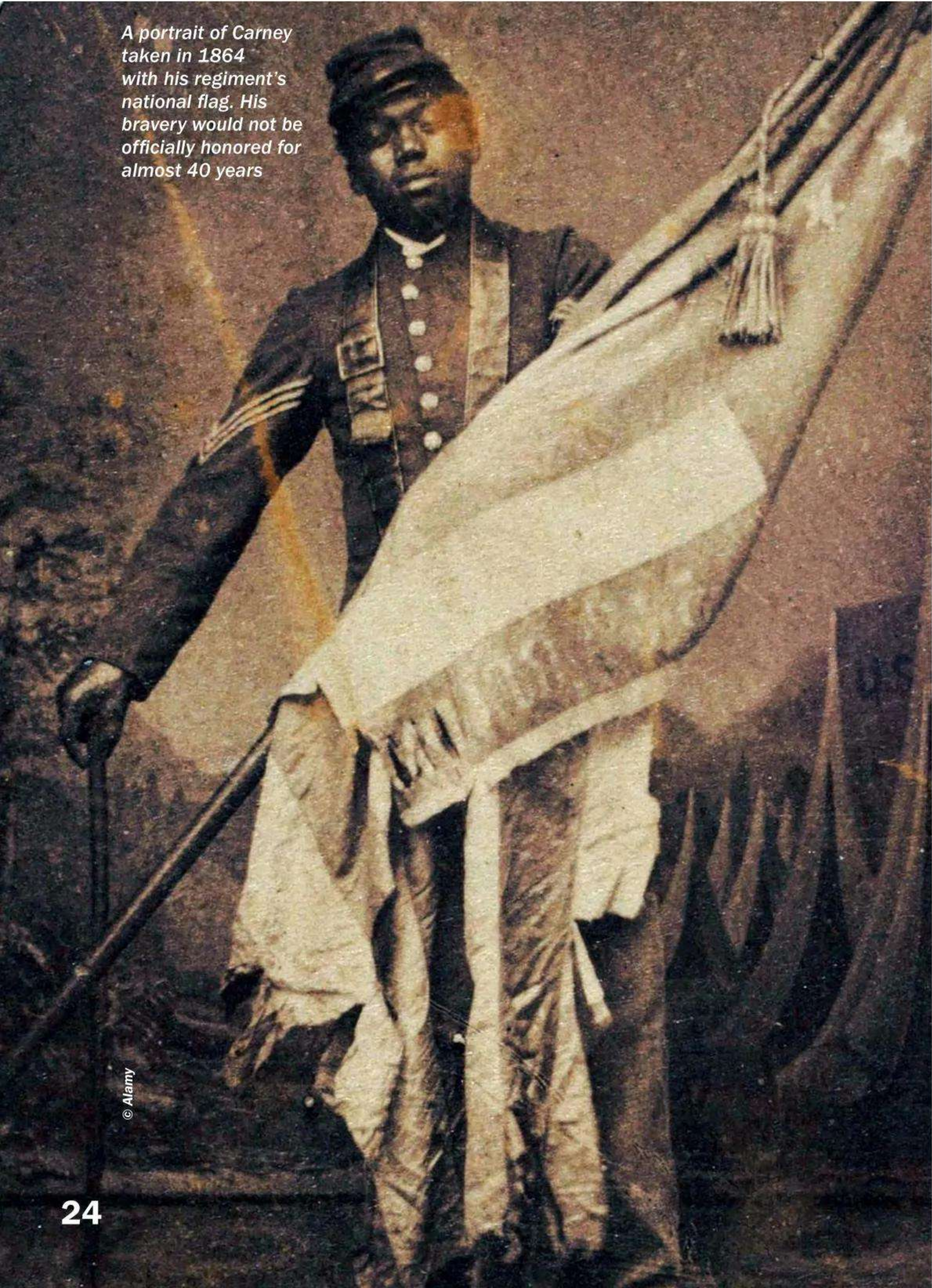
The 54th advanced to within 150 yards of the fort before the Confederates opened up with a devastating hail of musket and cannon fire. This concentrated fire tore through the ranks, killing and wounding many. The color guard was killed to a man and Carney, of C Company, despite already being wounded, took up the national flag of the regiment and continued to advance towards the parapet. One version recounts that as he saw the flag falling Carney threw away his own gun and took up the flag instead.

The tide was coming in and, adding to their perils, the moat was now filled with three feet of water. Some enemy stood on the parapet and

fired down into the water-filled moat at the men of the 54th. Carney advanced with the color and reached the parapet of the fort, kneeling on it and planting the flag in one account. The regiment followed him. There, having not fired a single shot in their advance, the men of the 54th engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the 51st North Carolina Infantry. Musket butts and bayonets were used to bloody effect on the parapet top.

The Union troops were hugely outnumbered and soon forced back. Many of the officers of the 54th were wounded; Colonel Shaw had reached the parapet of the fort but had been shot and killed there, pierced by seven wounds according to Confederate reports. Until that moment he had encouraged the regiment on with cries of “Forward, Fifty-fourth!” Lieutenant Colonel Hallowell was severely wounded in the groin; Captain Willard and the next eight in seniority, three lieutenants and the adjutant had also been wounded. Another of the wounded was Lewis Henry Douglas, son of Frederick Douglass, the famous orator who led the calls for recruitment in Massachusetts only a few months before. In all, the 54th suffered almost 30 per cent casualties: 30 were killed in action, 24 died of wounds, 15 were captured and 52 were reported missing. It is possible that they were victims of Davis’ proclamation and not accorded the treatment due to enemy combatants. Only 315 men survived. Other accounts state that 272 men of the 54th were

*A portrait of Carney taken in 1864 with his regiment’s national flag. His bravery would not be officially honored for almost 40 years*



*This 1890 lithograph of the Battle of Fort Wagner shows Gould’s death and a sergeant (presumably Carney) with the flag on the parapet beside him*





A 2004 painting of Sergeant Carney's action, 'The Old Flag Never Touched the Ground', showing him and men of the 54th on the parapet of Fort Wagner



killed, wounded or missing out of 600—almost 50 per cent casualties.

As the men of the 54th retired, Carney realized that he too would need to retreat. He made his way back towards the Union lines, covered by a single rifleman from the 100th New York Infantry Regiment. During his withdrawal Carney was wounded twice more, making his way back crawling on one knee. One of those bullets could not be extracted and remained buried in his flesh until his dying day.

Throughout his advance and retreat he held the color aloft. Once he was back in Union lines, he refused to relinquish the national flag except to an officer of his own regiment—the man he gave it to was 19-year-old Captain Luis F. Emilio (who would later write the history of the regiment). As he moved through Union lines he was cheered by the men and he uttered his famous statement: “Boys, I only did my duty; the old flag never touched the ground.” According to Emilio, the State color had been ripped from its pole and lay in the water of the moat (later found by the enemy); only the staff was taken back to the regiment.

By 10 p.m. the Union assault had failed with 1,500 men lost; 800 were buried the following day. The fort remained in Confederate hands, the rebels only suffering 174 casualties. However, they would not hold it for long. A continuous 60-day bombardment was begun by the Union that unearthed the recently dead and buried, making the conditions pestilent. The fort was ultimately abandoned on September 7.

The actions of the 54th at Fort Wagner proved to both sides, however, the value and

courage of African-American troops. Stories of Carney's bravery were key to that reputation. Numbers of African-American enlistments grew as more and more men sought to serve; 180,000 African-American soldiers followed in the footsteps of Carney and the 54th.

Carney would not be presented with his Medal of Honor for 37 years, receiving it in May 1900. It was presented to him by President McKinley, a fellow Civil War veteran and the last veteran to serve as President. In the intervening period another 20 men of African-American descent had been awarded the Medal of Honor, the earliest being Robert Blake, who received his medal in April 1864 for actions on the gunboat the U.S.S. *Marblehead* on Christmas Day 1863. Carney's action, however, predated Blake's by five months and was the first by an African-American soldier to be awarded the Medal of Honor.

Some accounts of Carney's career claim he was promoted to sergeant after his action; others claim he was a sergeant at the time of the battle and depictions show him as such. He posed for a photo in 1864 with the flag he had carried, and in it he wears a sergeant's stripes (he also carries a cane showing he was still recovering from his wounds).

Carney helped Emilio research his *History of the Fifty-fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1863–1865*, which was published in 1891. In the preface, Emilio thanks Carney, among others, for their recollections. There, as he carried the flag forward, Carney is called sergeant, which might decide the matter.

Carney's serious wounds meant he was honorably discharged from the army in late June 1864. Thereafter he became a mailman in New Bedford, Massachusetts, for 32 years. He died after an elevator accident in 1908.

Carney's bravery and medal were celebrated, but not consistently; C Company (mainly recruited around New Bedford) instituted a Carney Guards (a Shaw Guards was also instituted). Depictions of the battle made before 1900, which memorialize Colonel Shaw, do not pay the same respect to Carney's heroics. After the medal was awarded, Carney's statement was memorialized in a song *Boys the Old Flag Never Touched the Ground*, published in 1901 and dedicated to Carney. In its lyrics the song tells the entire story of Carney's bravery.

Several novels and works of non-fiction have also told the story, such as *One Gallant Rush* (1965) by Peter Burchard (and based on the letters of Robert Gould Shaw). The story of the 54th and the Second Battle of Fort Wagner was the subject of the 1989 Academy Award-winning film *Glory*, starring Mathew Broderick as Colonel Shaw. Despite the subject, the film does not include Carney and his actions are given to a fictitious Private Trip, played by Denzel Washington (and for which he won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor). In the film, it is Trip who lifts the flag and carries it forward. The film also has color sergeants in the fort, although in the actual battle they had been killed early in the assault and it was from them Carney took up the flag. Carney's story deserved (and deserves) better.





# THE GREAT WAR

Countless displays of American courage unfolded throughout the bloody denouement of World War I



24649









# ALVIN C. YORK

In one of the most infamous assaults of World War I, Sergeant York defied the odds and took 132 German soldiers prisoner with a handful of men

WORDS: DOM RESEIGH-LINCOLN

Considering the icon of American military success he'd become, Sergeant Alvin C. York of the 82nd Division was an unlikely candidate for warfare. A reformed violent alcoholic and devout Christian, the Tennessee-born son of a blacksmith originally tried to avoid enlisting for military service—not because he wanted to dodge the responsibility of serving his country on the front lines, but rather because he didn't believe in taking up arms against his fellow man.

"I was worried clean through. I didn't want to go and kill," he remarked at a lecture later in his life. "I believed in my Bible." But his request for conscientious objection (a position he would later deny) was formally rejected and he was soon shipped off to fight. Yet for all protestations, Sergeant York would perform one of the most daring acts of the entire conflict and earn the most prestigious commendation in the U.S. military: the Medal of Honor.

The third of 11 children, Alvin C. York was born on December 13, 1887, into an impoverished family living in Pall Mall, Tennessee. The United States was only two decades removed from the onslaught of the Civil War when York entered the world and the former secessionist state was still recovering from the devastating domestic conflict. Times were hard. As such, York, like his seven brothers, spent only nine months in formal education before his father William brought him home to work full-time on the farm.

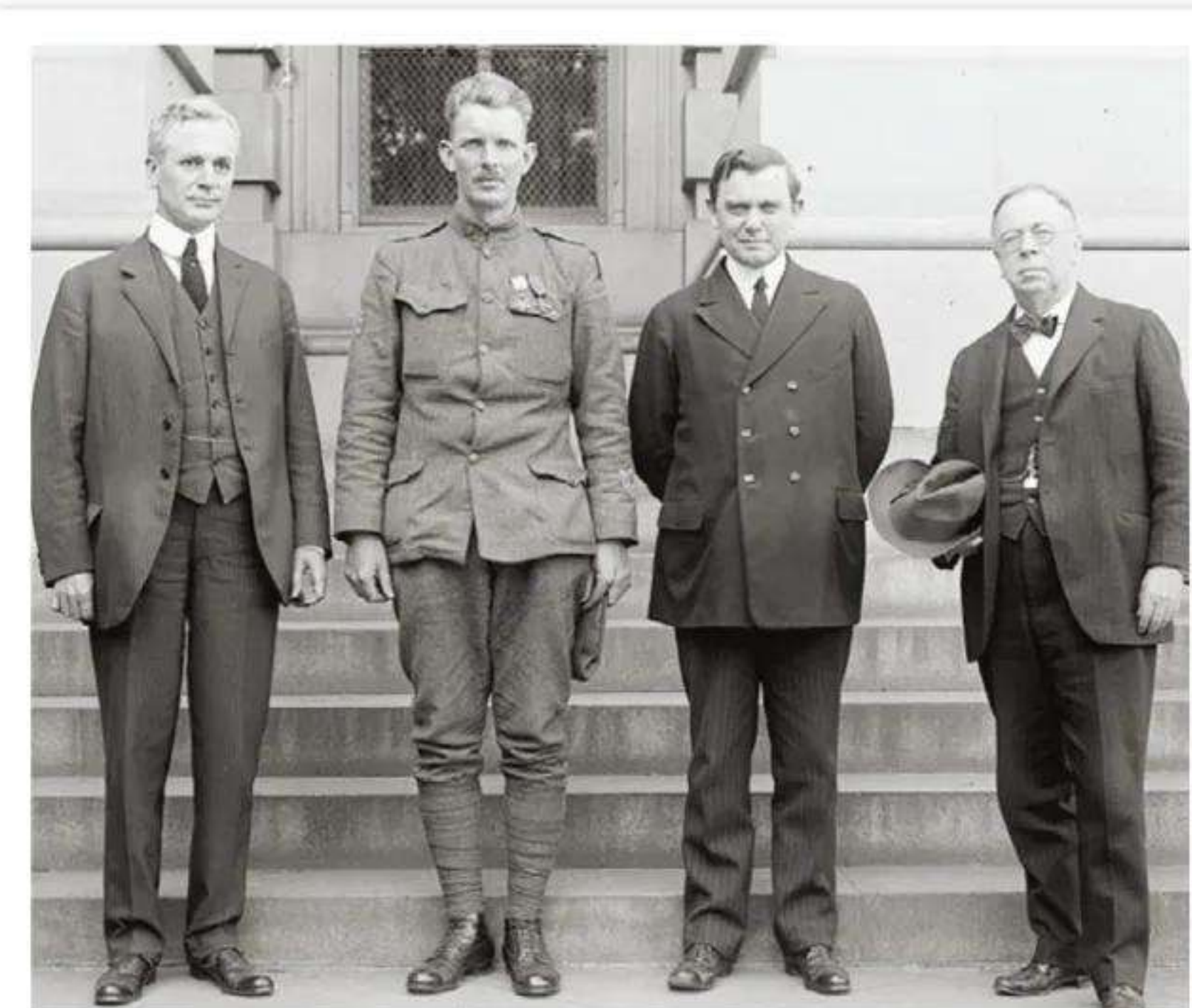
From an early age the young York was no stranger to the hard graft of farm work. When his father died in November 1911, the running of the household fell to the 23 year old (his two older brothers Henry and Joseph had already moved out of the family home) and he soon took up a number of jobs, including logging and

working on the local railway. He was devoted to his family but was also a volatile alcoholic, one prone to brawls and dust-ups in local bars.

He still attended church on a regular basis with his devout mother and siblings, but it wasn't until January 1915 that York finally left the alcohol behind and embraced his faith. While he was raised a Methodist, it was a more recent branch of the Christian faith that drew his attention. His new congregation, the Church of Christ in Christian Union, had no official pacifist doctrines per se, but it did shun violence as much as it opposed division between the many Christian sects.

On June 5, 1917, the Selective Service Act came into effect and men aged between 21 and 30 were legally bound to enlist for military service. York attempted to seek conscientious objection on the grounds of his stringent new spiritual beliefs, but as the Union wasn't recognized as an official branch his request was denied. He was drafted into the U.S. Army

**Below:** York became a figurehead for promoting the U.S. military's successes in World War I, but he never felt comfortable about his fame



and assigned to Company G, 328th Infantry Regiment, 82nd Infantry Division at Camp Gordon, Georgia, but his new posting didn't allay his fears. Troubled by the war, York was granted ten days of leave; when he returned he came with the belief that God intended him to fight, devoting himself to his new mission with all the fervour he'd given his new church.

York and his division were posted to France to take part in the U.S. Army's first offensive of World War I, the Saint-Mihiel Offensive. Up until this point, the United States had attempted to stay out of the conflict, but the unrestricted and vicious attacks from German submarines had proved an encroachment too far, with President Woodrow Wilson requesting Congress officially declare war in April that year.

When U.S. Army forces, including the U.S. Air Army Service (later known as the U.S. Air Force) arrived in northeast France in September 1917, they caught the Germans in a state of retreat. The unprepared enemy scrambled to react to the new American military presence, and York (now a corporal) and his fellow compatriots helped secure an Allied victory in a matter of a few days. The 82nd Division was then shifted further north to take part in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, one of the final battles of World War I.

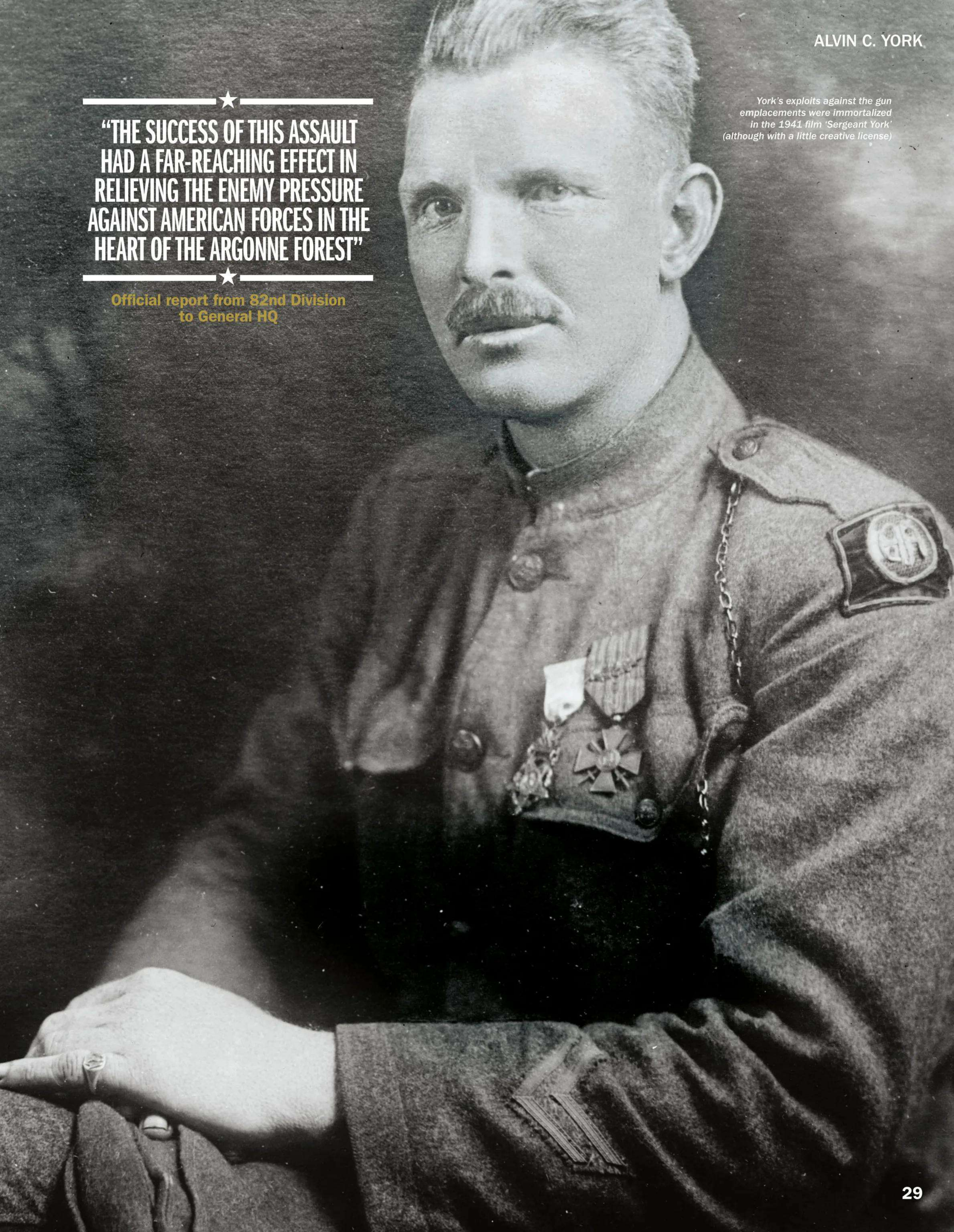
On October 8, Allied forces, including the 82nd, successfully took Hill 223, located along the Decauville railway line north of Chatel-Chéhéry. However, as forces swarmed down the hill on the other side, they found the triangular valley at the bottom was a death trap. German machine gun emplacements were encamped on ridges around the valley and they gunned down Allied soldiers in their droves. Pulling back to a safe distance, it was decided that the only way to progress forward and take control of the Decauville railway was to maneuver around the gun nests and silence them.



★  
"THE SUCCESS OF THIS ASSAULT  
HAD A FAR-REACHING EFFECT IN  
RELIEVING THE ENEMY PRESSURE  
AGAINST AMERICAN FORCES IN THE  
HEART OF THE ARGONNE FOREST"  
★

Official report from 82nd Division  
to General HQ

York's exploits against the gun  
emplacements were immortalized  
in the 1941 film 'Sergeant York'  
(although with a little creative license)





“WITH THE GUNNERS DISTRACTED BY THE REMAINDER OF HIS TEAM, THE CORPORAL MOVED FORWARD ALONE, MANEUVERING SWIFTLY AND SILENTLY THROUGH THE TRENCHES”

**05 German surrender** Despite the deadly wave of bullets peppering his position, York reportedly kills a total of 20 German soldiers. With his unit also proving unwaveringly defiant, German First Lieutenant Paul Jürgen Vollmer orders the surrender of the emplacements. A total of 132 German soldiers are taken prisoner.

**03 Taking charge** With Sergeant Early among those critically wounded, York is now in command of the unit. With the gun emplacement still shredding the cover around them, York leaves the remaining able soldiers to guard the prisoners while he moves forward alone to silence the guns.

**01 Behind enemy lines** Four noncommissioned officers, including a recently promoted Corporal York, and 13 privates are ordered to infiltrate enemy lines. Under the command of Sergeant Bernard Early, they're tasked with taking out a series of machine gun emplacements.

**02 Assault under fire** York and the unit overrun the headquarters of a German unit that was planning to launch a counterattack. While Early's men are dealing with the prisoners obtained from the German headquarters, a nearby gun nest hammers the exposed American soldiers, killing six of the team and wounding three others.



## “FEARLESSLY LEADING SEVEN MEN, HE CHARGED WITH GREAT DARING A MACHINE GUN NEST THAT WAS POURING DEADLY AND INCESSANT FIRE UPON HIS PLATOON”

### Official citation for Sergeant York's Medal of Honor

A unit under the command of Sergeant Bernard Early was tasked with moving behind enemy lines and overrunning the emplacements. A total of four noncommissioned officers, including York, and 13 privates used the large amount of brush and tall bushes to flank the gun nests, moving through woodland until they were positioned at the rear of the network. Working from such an advantageous position, Early, York and the rest of the unit were able to immediately overrun the main headquarters.

The tactic proved to be both a blessing and a curse for the team. Caught completely by surprise, the HQ was taken almost entirely without bloodshed and Early and his men seized a large contingent of prisoners within minutes of beginning their offensive. Unfortunately, the covert nature of the assault was soon torn apart when one of the German soldiers manning a gun emplacement noticed the fracas and opened fire on the exposed unit. Six Americans were killed outright, and another three were critically injured in the opening salvo, including Early.

With his senior officer incapacitated, command of the unit was passed to York. By this stage, the gun emplacement was peppering the cover sheltering York, the wounded and those soldiers still able to fight. It had become clear that the unit wouldn't be able to silence the guns from their current position, so York ordered his men to stay where they were and continue exchanging fire. With the gunners distracted by the remainder of his team, the corporal moved forward alone, maneuvering swiftly and silently through the trenches.

Lying prone and peeking over the embankments, York began sniping at the

gunners, killing enemy after enemy as the Germans struggled to locate this unexpected source of fire. However, just because he had accepted that his life as a soldier was a calling from God didn't mean that he'd left his ideals behind in Georgia. He began calling out to the soldiers, imploring them to surrender and avoid further bloodshed, only returning fire when it was clear such a course of action was not a consideration. With his men also pressing the gun emplacement, a contingent of six German soldiers were dispatched to hunt him down. The kill team might have been successful had York not spied them in time, switching to his pistol and dispatching each one at close range.

York continued his assault on the machine gun emplacement, picking off any soldier that was foolish enough to peer over the embankment. As time went by, the man in charge of the gun nest, First Lieutenant Paul Jürgen Vollmer, realized his men were too exposed and proceeded to offer his and his men's surrender to the lone sniper. York accepted and returned to American lines with 132 German prisoners in tow.

Some reports suggest York killed up to 20 German soldiers that morning, although he always distanced himself from those claims as well as the propaganda that swirled around him upon his return. Yet whatever that final number may have been, Corporal York put his life on the line in one of the most daring acts of valor. He was swiftly promoted to sergeant and awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

Following the end of the war, all commendations were reviewed and York's medal was upgraded to the Medal of Honor in recognition of his actions in the final months of the conflict.

### 04 Exchange of attrition

More than 30 German machine guns are now blazing at York and his men. While calling out continuously in an effort to convince them to surrender, York is forced to kill enemy after enemy with his rifle. Six soldiers attempt to run him through with their bayonets, but he reluctantly dispatches them all with his pistol.



*Below: The Meuse-Argonne Offensive was one of the costliest to American lives, with more than 26,000 killed*





# WILLIAM J. DONOVAN

During the 1918 Meuse-Argonne Offensive, this officer led the 165th Infantry Regiment against German defenses. Wounded, he refused evacuation, directed his command in action and exhibited great heroism

WORDS: MICHAEL E. HASKEW

**T**he enemy position was formidable. At the eastern end of the fortified Hindenburg Line, the Germans had prepared a veritable killing ground to greet any assault in the sector between the winding River Meuse and the dense, dark Argonne Forest. In less than a month, the Armistice would cause the guns to fall silent. However, until then, Allied and German troops would continue to fight and die on the Western Front as the climax of World War I played out in the terrible autumn of 1918.

By September, the 42nd 'Rainbow' Division of the U.S. Army had become a veteran outfit, one blooded in battle and absorbing tremendous casualties. The fighting in the spring and summer had cleared the St Mihiel salient, but the troops had suffered badly, losing hundreds to concentrated enemy artillery and machine-gun fire. Among the dead was famed poet Joyce Kilmer, shot in the head by a sniper. Kilmer had accompanied Major William J. Donovan, commander of the 1st Battalion, 165th Infantry Regiment, to the front line on July 30, as the officer prepared



to lead an attack. The 165th, originally the 69th Regiment, the Fighting 69th of the New York National Guard, was a storied unit tracing its lineage to the American Civil War, and one of its finest hours was realized in the crucible of war-torn France.

Donovan was already a soldier of burgeoning renown. Known for his personal bravery and nicknamed 'Wild Bill', his actions during this three-day stretch of combat earned him the Distinguished Service Cross. During the course of the war, he was wounded at least three times and nearly blinded by poison gas. His heroism led to awards of the Silver Star, Distinguished Service Medal, Purple Heart, the French Croix de Guerre with Palm and Silver Star, and numerous other honors that made Donovan one of the most highly decorated soldiers of the Great War. Even so, on October 14–15, in the line at the Meuse-Argonne near the town of Landres-et-St Georges, this leader of men

*Left: Colonel William J. Donovan leads the 165th Infantry Regiment during a 1919 victory parade in New York City*



*'Wild Bill' Donovan led from the front during the Great War, receiving the Medal of Honor for his actions in October 1918*

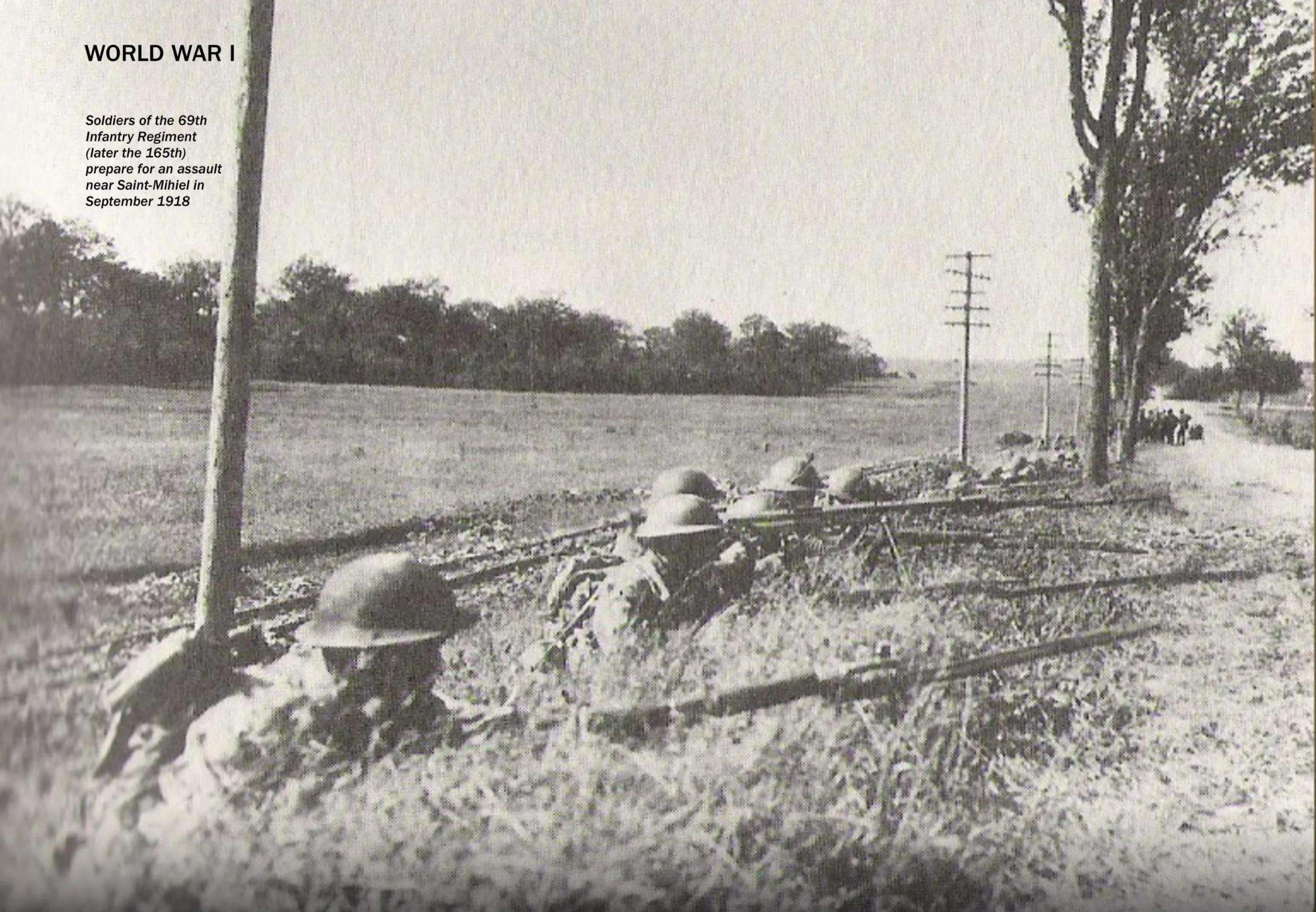
★  
"IT DOESN'T BELONG TO ME. IT BELONGS TO THE BOYS WHO ARE NOT HERE, THE BOYS WHO ARE RESTING UNDER THE WHITE CROSSES IN FRANCE..."

★  
William J. Donovan on receiving the Medal of Honor



## WORLD WAR I

*Soldiers of the 69th  
Infantry Regiment  
(later the 165th)  
prepare for an assault  
near Saint-Mihiel in  
September 1918*



exhibited courage under fire that is seldom seen. Better known for his formation and leadership of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner of the modern Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), during World War II, he first gained the admiration of a grateful nation on the battlefield, and during those crucial hours at the Meuse-Argonne, he earned the Medal of Honor.

### INTO THE RAVINE

Promoted to lieutenant colonel, Donovan led the 165th Regiment into action on October 14. Its objective was a German position atop a steep slope with three lines of entrenched infantry studded with machine gun nests and artillery to rain destruction across the small stream, open ground and the ravine that dominated the approaches. Prior to the assault, upper echelon officers had expected 60 per cent casualties among the attacking troops, and in the opening moments that prediction looked to be coming true.

Donovan later recalled the hours leading up to the desperate attack and the withering fire his men encountered immediately after jumping off. "We were suddenly ordered forward to relieve another division, the 1st... Our way led past freshly killed and yet unburied Germans, through [the] unmistakable smell of dead horses... The party started. I moved to the forward position

which they were shelling heavily. I could see no advance on our right. Our hour struck and promptly the leading battalion moved out. The Germans at once put down a heavy barrage and swept the hill we had to climb with indirect machine-gun fire. The advance did not go well..."

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**"... I HAVE TWO  
EXTRAORDINARY CHARACTERS  
IN THIS DIVISION, NEITHER  
OF WHOM I CAN CONTROL  
... THESE TWO WIN MORE  
MEDALS THAN I CAN GIVE  
OUT. ONE IS BILL DONOVAN  
AND THE OTHER IS DOUGLAS  
MACARTHUR"**

---

**General Charles T. Menoher,  
commander 42nd Infantry Division**

Observers noted that Donovan had declined to remove his rank insignia or medals, preferring to go into action in full uniform. It was a gesture of bravery and confidence for those around him, but it also made Donovan a prime target for enemy snipers. When warned about this, Donovan retorted, "They can't hit me, and they won't hit you!"

As the 165th Regiment moved forward, German resistance intensified, and the slow progress of adjoining units opened the men to devastating flanking fire. A handful of American soldiers reached the coils of barbed wire near the crest of the high ground only to then become entangled. Donovan wrote, "Men were dropping all over. It was a pretty difficult place. Those who got to the wire were killed or wounded. The rest finally came to a halt on the slope running up from the stream along which there was some cover here and there but not much."

The 165th had advanced about two miles before stopping short of its objective. A number of the company commanders were inexperienced. Preparations had been hurried. The opening barrage from the U.S. artillery appeared to have done little to diminish the enemy fire, and the regimental commander conceded that the assault had been too weak to succeed, particularly without the tank support that had been promised but didn't arrive on time. Nevertheless, Donovan



displayed a coolness under fire that steadied the men in their precarious foxholes just under cover from the incessant stream of German small-arms fire.

"There were times when I had to march at the head of the companies to get them forward," he remembered in a letter. "They would follow me. New men need some visible symbol of authority."

### DETERMINATION IN THE DARK

Donovan's troops had clawed a foothold within 550 yards of the German line, and he ordered a reserve battalion forward. However, the renewed assault was beaten back with heavy losses, and by 8.00 p.m. on October 14 the order had been passed to consolidate the gains and hold for the night.

Donovan rolled into a small shell hole with his telephone set close at hand. He dined on a raw onion and two tough crackers known as 'hardtack'. He ordered a lieutenant to lead a party to the rear in search of food. Unfortunately these men never returned.

Aware of the prospect of a German counterattack, he knew that the 165th would be ordered forward again after daylight, but directions from higher command were scant. Ammunition was replenished, and the depleted 165th gathered itself to move forward. At 6.20 a.m., the order to advance at 7.30 a.m. finally came through; there was little time to refine the tactical effort.

"A heavy mist was hanging," Lieutenant Colonel Donovan remembered. "I went around to the men and talked to them. All of this was close to the German line... I should not have been there but remained so because it would have had a bad effect on the men if I had taken position further in the rear."

### FORWARD ONCE AGAIN

Although the tanks assigned to the attack had still not arrived, Donovan ordered his men to advance at the appointed hour. The situation soon became dire. He sent messengers to the rear but they were killed, meaning that their pleas for assistance went undelivered. A few tanks did come forward, but several were disabled by German artillery.

With no regard for his personal safety, Donovan had moved among his soldiers, encouraging them and instructing those whose officers and NCOs had been killed or wounded. "I had walked to the different units and was coming back to the telephone when smash, I felt as if somebody had hit me on the back of the leg with a spiked club," he wrote. "I fell like a log, but after a few minutes managed to crawl into my little telephone hole. A machine gun lieutenant ripped open my breeches and put on the first aid. The leg hurt, but there were many things to be done."

Relentless German shelling took its toll, and poison gas was unleashed on the Americans. "Beside me three men were blown up, and I was showered with the remnants of their bodies," Donovan recalled. The telephone went dead. The surviving tanks retired. However, Donovan remained in the hole, just yards from the enemy line. Slipping in and out of consciousness from loss of blood, he maintained command for five hours until wrapped in a blanket and evacuated. The German position finally fell to the 42nd Division on October 16.

### RECOVERY AND RECOMPENSE

Donovan recovered from the bullet wound in his knee, spending days in a French hospital. Initially, he received an oak leaf cluster for

his Distinguished Service Cross, but Father Francis Duffy, the famous chaplain of the 165th Infantry, lobbied successfully for an upgrade to the Medal of Honor.

The hero received his country's highest award for valor during a ceremony in New York City that drew 4,000 veterans. War Department General Order No. 56, issued on December 30, 1922, noted that Donovan had "encouraged all near him by example, moving among his men in exposed positions, reorganizing decimated platoons, and accompanying them forward in attacks".

During the inter-war years Donovan returned to his prosperous New York law practice, served as U.S. Attorney for the Western District of New York and held positions in the Justice Department.

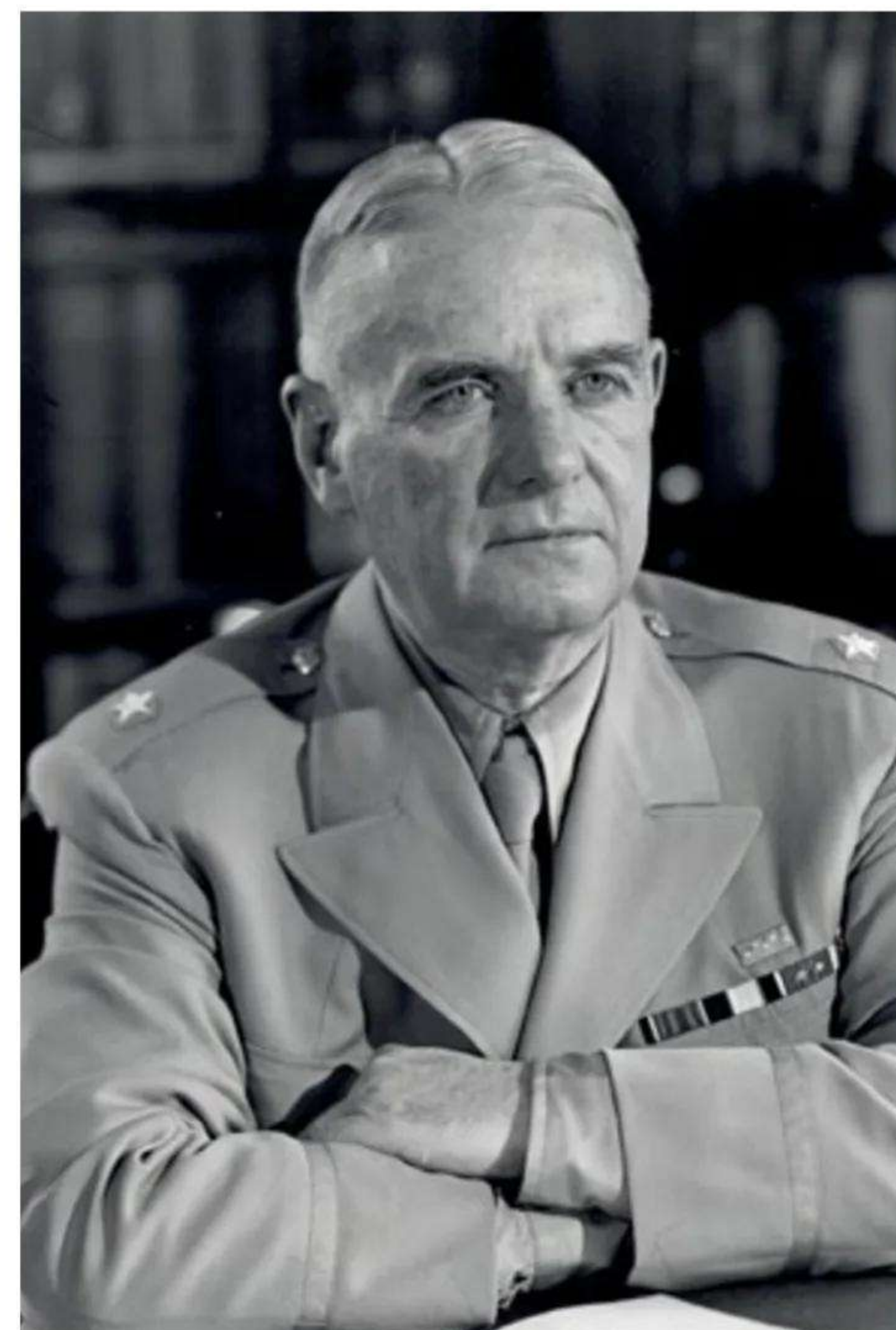
During the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, he took on several important international diplomatic tasks. He was appointed coordinator of information on July 11, 1941, and became the nation's foremost advocate for the formation of a centralized, federal intelligence agency. Subsequently, Donovan guided the OSS during World War II, rising to the Army rank of major general.

After the war Donovan worked behind the scenes to establish the modern CIA. He served briefly as U.S. Ambassador to Thailand, and died at 76 on February 8, 1959.

He remains the only individual to have received the Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross, Distinguished Service Medal and National Security Medal, among the most prestigious decorations awarded by the United States, and those desperate hours in the Argonne Forest in 1918 were indicative of his rare and noble dedication.



Major General William Donovan, director of the OSS, confers with Colonel William Jackson in April 1945



William J. 'Wild Bill' Donovan led the Office of Strategic Services, forerunner of the modern U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)

All Images: PD / NARA / US Army Signal Corps





# EDDIE RICKENBACKER

Proving he wouldn't ask his pilots to do anything he wouldn't do himself, this lieutenant flew a solo mission over Billy, France, in September 1918 in which he took on seven enemy planes

WORDS: MURRAY DAHM

**T**o prove to the men of his 94th Aero Squadron that he was one of them, Lieutenant Eddie Rickenbacker took to the air alone on September 25, 1918, over Billy, France. Spotting seven enemy planes—five Fokker D.VIIs protecting two Halberstadt CL.IIs—Rickenbacker, disregarding the odds, attacked without hesitation and fired on the enemy formation. Diving through the German planes, he downed one of the Fokkers and one of the Halberstadts and returned home. For this action he was awarded his eighth (a record) Distinguished Service Cross, and in 1931 President Herbert Hoover awarded him the Medal of Honor for this action.

By the time of America's entry into World War I in April 1917, Rickenbacker was already a household name. Obsessed with engines, he had become a mechanic to the racing driver Lee Frayer in the 1906 Vanderbilt Cup at the age of only 15. In 1910 he became a race car driver himself, taking part in the Indianapolis 500 in 1911.

Rickenbacker joined the Duesenberg brothers to develop a new Mason racing car with which he achieved national fame in 1914, becoming known as 'Fast Eddie' for his hard driving and his daring—skills he would utilize as a pilot. He set a world land speed record at Daytona in 1914 of 134mph. He moved around various racing teams and came close to being the

champion driver in 1916. That year he signed on to the British Sunbeam team and sailed to the UK, despite the war raging in Europe. He was detained in Liverpool on suspicion of being the son of a disgraced Prussian baron, but a newspaper had invented these 'facts'. He was, in fact, the third son of Swiss-German Ohio immigrants. However, he soon abandoned the original spelling of his name, Rickenbacher.

Rickenbacker had already shown some interest in aviation (his first flight was in 1916) and his time in England reinforced that interest. He suggested making a flying squadron out of racing car drivers, men who were experts in motors and speed. Rickenbacker volunteered as soon as America entered the war, despite the fact he was earning an estimated \$40,000 a year as a racing driver.

He arrived in France as the chauffeur to Major Townsend F. Dodd, the first commissioned U.S. Army aviator. By fixing a broken motor, Rickenbacker also impressed Lieutenant Colonel Billy Mitchell (the man regarded as the father of the U.S. Air Force). Rickenbacker may have pestered both these aviators to give him a chance in the air. First, however, he was asked to become the chief engineer at the flight school at Issoudun Aerodrome, the largest airbase in the world at the time, where U.S. airmen were trained before leaving for the front. Rickenbacker seized his chance and undertook flight training—possibly

lying about his age by claiming to be 25 (the upper limit). He was in fact 26. He received five weeks training, with a total of 25 air hours, in September 1917 and was then commissioned as a lieutenant.

Rickenbacker's fellow trainees considered him uncouth and out of place. Most pilots were college students, and the rough, brusque Ohioan was shunned despite his expertise. He was also over age and had no college degree (a requirement), but still he persisted. By March, Rickenbacker had finished gunnery training and moved to the Villeneuve-les-Vertus Aerodrome. There he was mentored by Major Raoul Lufbery, a fighter ace who had served with the French Air Force before serving with the United States Army Air Service from 1917. The newly established 94th Aero Squadron, the 'Hat-in-the-ring' gang, was led by Lufbery, and many of its flying Nieuport 28 fighters lacked armament.

Rickenbacker's first combat patrol, on March 6, 1918, was with Lufbery and another pilot; only Lufbery's plane had guns. Rickenbacker made his first sortie on April 13, and on the 29th he shot down his first enemy plane. The man who accompanied Rickenbacker and Lufbery on March 6 was Lieutenant Douglas Campbell—he shot down his first enemy on April 14 and would become America's first 'ace' of the war.

By May 28 (less than a month after his first victory) Rickenbacker had shot down his fifth



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**"WHILE ON A VOLUNTARY  
PATROL OVER THE LINES,  
LIEUTENANT RICKENBACKER  
ATTACKED SEVEN ENEMY  
PLANES... DISREGARDING  
THE ODDS AGAINST HIM,  
HE DIVED ON THEM..."**

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**Medal of Honor citation, 1931**



*Captain Rickenbacker with  
his Medal of Honor in 1931*



enemy plane, earning his ‘ace’ status. He was awarded the Croix de Guerre for his efforts. Later he would be awarded the first of his eight Distinguished Service Crosses for his victory on April 29 (his actions on September 25 were also later awarded the Medal of Honor). By that time in May, however, Lufbery had and Rickenbacker was sick with an abscess. During his convalescence, Rickenbacker reflected that he needed to be less foolhardy as a pilot and more disciplined. (He had become lost in fog and was forced to land his plane in a field on one of his first flights, and he had almost crashed more than once.)

Returning to active duty in September 1918, the squadron was now equipped with reliable Spad XIII and Rickenbacker’s tally began to rise. A new commander was needed for the squadron and 27-year-old Lieutenant Rickenbacker was chosen on September 24. To show he was a leader who would never abandon his pilots or ask them to do something he wasn’t willing to do himself, he went up alone on September 25 over Billy.

In total, he achieved a tally of 26 victories, making him the ‘Ace of Aces’ for the U.S. during World War I. His tally would not be exceeded by an American pilot until Captain Richard Bong in April 1944 (America’s top ace of World War II, with 40 victories). Rickenbacker still ranks as the U.S.’s tenth top ace of all time.



Rickenbacker immediately after WWI in 1919

**“I WAS THE ONLY AUDIENCE FOR THE GREATEST SHOW EVER PRESENTED. ON BOTH SIDES OF NO MAN’S LAND, THE TRENCHES ERUPTED. BROWN-UNIFORMED MEN POURED OUT OF THE AMERICAN TRENCHES, GRAY-GREEN UNIFORMS OUT OF THE GERMAN. FROM MY OBSERVER’S SEAT OVERHEAD, I WATCHED THEM THROW THEIR HELMETS IN THE AIR, DISCARD THEIR GUNS, WAVE THEIR HANDS”**

Rickenbacker in 1967

Rickenbacker’s last 14 victories were achieved in October 1918, the penultimate month of the war, a month during which he was promoted to captain. Confirmation of victories was needed and several did not come for some time (even after the war). Rickenbacker’s first solo victory (on May 7, 1918) wasn’t confirmed until another pilot (James Hall) who had been shot down and captured later in the same flight was released. Rickenbacker did not like his title of ‘Ace of Aces’—it had been given out with much fanfare to pilots during the war and the three previous holders, Lufbery, David Putnam and Frank Luke, had all been shot down and killed. Rickenbacker’s luck, however, would continue to hold.

Soon the 94th squadron was taking out observation balloons to ‘blind the eyes of the enemy’, and as proof of his leadership several of Rickenbacker’s men downed more of them than he did. Rickenbacker, however, flew more missions and had more hours in the air than his men, amassing 300 combat hours and 134 ‘dogfights’. He had several rules for his fliers to ensure their success and survival—one of them being that the enemy should be approached carefully and only fired on at close range. (Early on the guns on his Nieuport 28 kept jamming at this crucial moment, robbing him of several victories.) He encouraged his men to only attack if they had at least a 50 per cent chance of success and to break for home if necessary. He held meetings with his pilots to discuss



A modern replica of a Spad XIII in the colors of Rickenbacker’s 94th Aero Squadron



Issoudun Aerodrome in 1918, where Rickenbacker received only five weeks training—a total of 25 hours flying time





Rickenbacker in his Spad XIII, in which he scored the majority of his victories

tactics and used blackboards to plot out how attacks could be managed. As a mechanic, he also stressed the importance of engine maintenance and the reliability of the aircraft as paramount to their success. Later, his rules included punctuality, loyalty and an intense schedule (he would work seven days a week).

When the Armistice was declared in November 1918, Rickenbacker flew over No Man's Land alone and witnessed the lines of American and German troops meeting in celebration. When he was discharged, he was promoted to major, although he felt he hadn't earned that promotion and so used captain (he became known as 'Captain Eddie') for the rest of his career. He wrote a book, *Fighting the Flying Circus*, in 1919 but returned to the motor industry and founded the Rickenbacker Motor Company in 1922. Though soon burdened with massive debts, he refused to declare bankruptcy.

With backing he bought and became the president of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in 1927 and took up a position with Cadillac and LaSalle for General Motors. He began writing a comic strip in 1933, *Ace Drummond*, which was syndicated in 135 newspapers nationwide. The stories were inspired by his wartime experiences (he had refused a film career where he would have been employed in 'unspecified roles'). The illustrator for the comic was Clayton Knight, a fellow World War I aviator (although a New Yorker, he had flown for the British Royal Flying Corps). The series was turned into a film serial in 1936.

All the while, Rickenbacker promoted the potential of aviation and encouraged several cities to develop airports. His most long-lasting venture was the establishment of Eastern Air Lines with help through his contacts at General Motors in 1934. He had already seen the potential of air mail and passenger transport in the 1920s and, with associates, he bought the company from General Motors in 1938, becoming president and general manager. In this capacity, Rickenbacker led many innovations in commercial aviation. He established connections with the Douglas Aircraft Company, although he later resisted the adoption of commercial jet aircraft—why replace perfectly good turboprop airliners with expensive jets, he asked. He also survived several air crashes (he did not use the word 'safe' with regards to flying but preferred 'reliable'), such as in Atlanta in February 1941 when he was gravely wounded, taking more than a year to recover from his injuries.

Rickenbacker supported the U.S. joining World War II before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and, when America joined the conflict he toured training facilities in the U.S. and England as a non-military observer. He also directed Eastern Air Lines to fly American troops as well as munitions and other supplies across the Atlantic. (This was a requirement, but Rickenbacker encouraged the company to fulfill its duty to the best of its ability.) He was involved in recommendations for military operations and was an advisor on bombing

strategy to both the Royal Air Force and the United States Army Air Force.

In October 1942 he was sent by U.S. Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, to the Pacific theatre. His B-17D flew off course and needed to ditch close to Japanese-controlled islands. Adrift for 24 days, Rickenbacker assumed command of the survivors and they caught fish to sustain themselves—eventually all but one of the men was rescued. The ordeal led to reforms of survival equipment (which from then on included fishing tackle and rubber sheets to protect men from sunburn and catch drinkable water) and navigation equipment. Rickenbacker was then sent to the USSR in 1943 on a fact-finding mission (including what the Soviets were doing with Lend-Lease equipment).

He had clashed with President Roosevelt prior to the war over cancellations of air mail contracts during the New Deal in 1934 and so all his 'official' missions came through Stimson rather than the president. At the conclusion of his trip, he did debrief with Winston Churchill but never met with President Roosevelt.

He resigned as president of Eastern Air Lines in 1959, finally retiring in 1963. He published his autobiography in 1967 and died in Switzerland in 1973 at the age of 82. His career is remembered for his achievements as America's Ace of Aces in World War I but his legacy extends well beyond that. In everything he did he displayed persistence and determination to do the best he possibly could.





# SAMUEL I. PARKER

Though badly wounded, this lieutenant colonel led his command in silencing German machine guns at the Battle of Soissons, becoming the most highly decorated U.S. infantryman of the war

WORDS: MICHAEL E. HASKEW

**T**he enemy fire was ferocious, but the attack of the combined 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the U.S. 28th Infantry Regiment had made its way forward in the oppressive heat of July 18, 1918. Second Lieutenant Samuel I. Parker, commanding one of the weary platoons that had been fighting for hours, surveyed the situation.

Parker realized that his newly established line was in a precarious position. While the front had been stabilized, at least for the moment, he could see little of the activity on the regiment's left flank. Just then, several German machine guns began to chatter; bullets ripped into the ground, shattered tree branches and cut down several of his soldiers. The 26-year-old officer responded instinctively.

Scanning the countryside, Parker located the source of the concentrated fire, which was coming from beyond the slope of a nearby hill and apparently covered by enemy infantrymen actively working their bolt-action Mauser rifles. Despite the torrent of bullets they faced, Parker ordered his men towards the crest of the hill. Along the way, he noticed a group of French colonial soldiers, apparently leaderless and wandering about the battlefield. Somehow, he overcame the language barrier and convinced them to join his push forward.

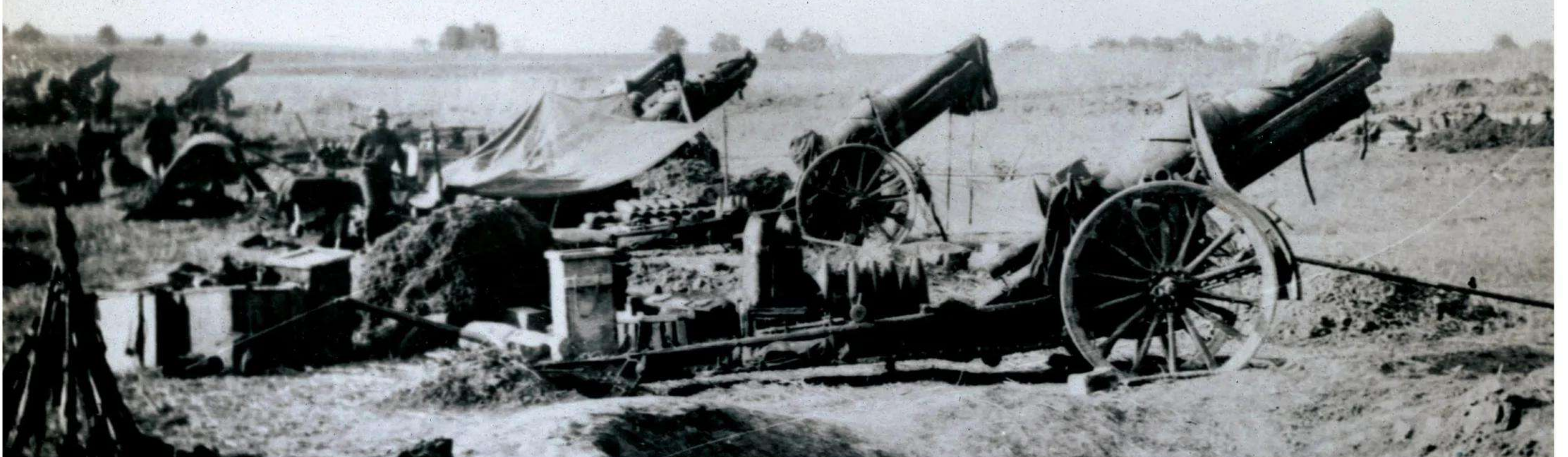
Within minutes the combined effort had gained the crest of the hill, but Parker was not finished. With a rush, his soldiers silenced six German machine guns concealed in a rock quarry that had unleashed the terrific enfilading fire on his previously exposed

position. Along with the machine guns, Parker's command bagged 40 prisoners. It had been an exhausting day, one of near-misses, narrow escapes and raw courage.

Parker's heroism occurred during the Battle of Soissons, a five-day engagement that helped seal the fate of the German Army's spring offensive of 1918, the last year of World War I.

The United States had declared war on Imperial Germany in April 1917 in response to provocations from the government of Kaiser Wilhelm II, including its approval of unrestricted submarine warfare in the Atlantic Ocean and an overture of alliance with Mexico (the notorious Zimmermann Note). News of America's entry into the war forced the hand of the German high command. Its senior officers, including Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich

*An American battery of heavy artillery guns occupies former enemy territory just south of Soissons*



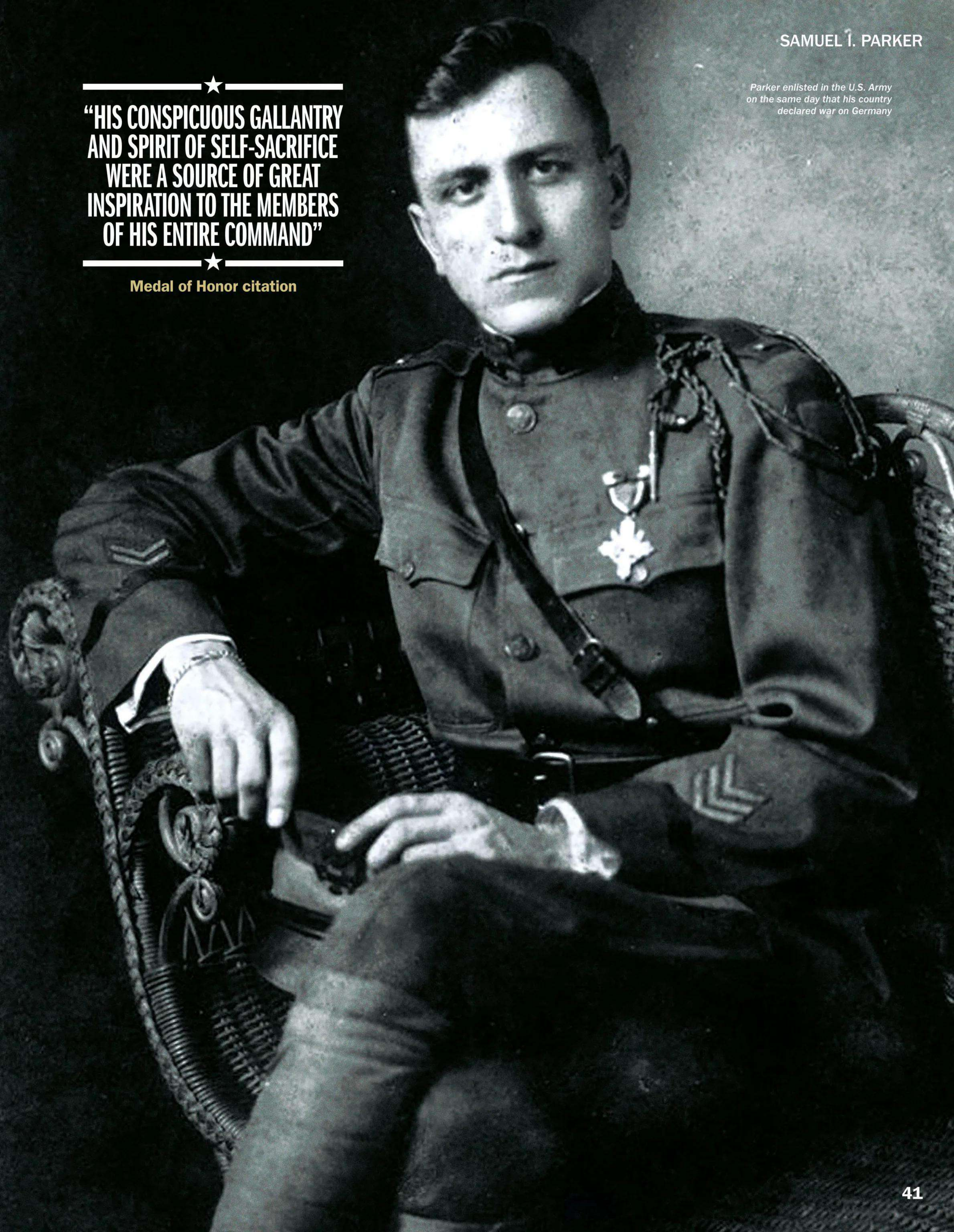
Images: Wiki / PD / Gov



*Parker enlisted in the U.S. Army  
on the same day that his country  
declared war on Germany*

★  
“HIS CONSPICUOUS GALLANTRY  
AND SPIRIT OF SELF-SACRIFICE  
WERE A SOURCE OF GREAT  
INSPIRATION TO THE MEMBERS  
OF HIS ENTIRE COMMAND”  
★

Medal of Honor citation





Ludendorff, realized the U.S. would eventually bring industrial might and manpower into the war that Germany could not match.

Time was of the essence and the spring offensive was the last, best hope for a German victory before American resources could be brought to bear in Europe in overwhelming numbers. The spring offensive had initially made good progress, but in one area along the banks of the River Marne the German advance had reached beyond the remainder of the front line, developing a sizable salient. In response to the German attacks the Allies (principally Britain, France and the U.S.) launched the Aisne-Marne counteroffensive.

Parker had enlisted in the army in his hometown of Monroe, North Carolina, in April 1917, on the very day that the United States declared war. Three months later, his Company K had been among the first American troops to arrive in France, on June 29, 1917. In time, the trickle of U.S. troops became a torrent. However, there was training to be completed and equipment to be issued before the Americans were committed to the front. By the following spring, the 1st Infantry Division had been deployed to support the exhausted French 1st Army. On May 28, 1918, the 28th Regiment assaulted the town of Cantigny. The



*American soldiers dig in near the French village of Soissons in the summer of 1918*

fight lasted just 45 minutes, and in the first American victory of the war the attackers took 250 prisoners, earning the nickname of the ‘Black Lions of Cantigny’.

Weeks later at Soissons, the objectives of the Allied effort were to cut the road and rail supply routes running north-to-south from Soissons to the village of Chateau-Thierry and force the Germans to either surrender or

pull out of the salient. On July 18, elements of the French 153rd Division had failed to move forward during Parker’s gallant advance, leaving a vulnerable gap in the Allied line. Parker’s initiative had not only saved his platoon from further casualties but may well have prevented a devastating German counter-thrust through the gap.

The following day, with numerous American officers killed or wounded in earlier fighting, Parker took command of the combined 2nd and 3rd Battalions. Even though a German bullet had ripped into his foot, causing a painful wound, he refused to be evacuated, intent on leading his men as the fighting resumed. The 1st Battalion, 28th Regiment stepped off with Parker’s combined battalion in support. The 1st Battalion quickly drew heavy machine-gun fire, and Parker maneuvered his own command to finally close the gap between the American and French troops. He remained in harm’s way until the line of the 28th Infantry Regiment was fully stabilized, crawling from place to place on his hands and knees while offering encouragement to his men and delivering orders. Miraculously, he avoided the hail of enemy small-arms fire and remained conscious despite his wound.

*This drawing depicts American soldiers firing at a German aircraft near Soissons*







Parker receives the Medal of Honor from President Franklin D. Roosevelt 18 years after his heroism in World War I

Parker's conspicuous bravery and commanding presence on July 18–19, 1918, were noted by those around him and resulted in his receiving his country's highest award for valor in combat, the Medal of Honor.

After recovering sufficiently, he rejoined his unit and again displayed remarkable heroism and leadership. During heavy combat near the town of Exermont, France, on October 5, 1918, just weeks prior to the armistice that ended World War I, he was in the midst of the fighting. His bravery that day earned his country's second-highest award for courage under fire, the Distinguished Service Cross.

The citation reads, "With total disregard for his own personal danger, Lieutenant Parker advanced directly on a machine gun 150 yards away while the enemy were firing directly at him and killed the gunner with his pistol. In the town of Exermont his platoon was almost surrounded after having taken several prisoners and inflicting heavy losses on the enemy; but despite the fact that only a few men of the platoon were left, continued to fight until other troops came to their aid."

For further heroism, Parker also received the U.S. military's third-highest decoration for bravery in combat, the Silver Star. The addition of an oak leaf cluster to it denoted two such occurrences. He also received the Purple Heart with oak leaf cluster for two wounds sustained fighting the Germans. In further recognition of his valor, he was awarded the Croix de Guerre.

## ★ "IT IS OUR DUTY TO REMEMBER THE SERVICE AND SACRIFICE OF LIEUTENANT COLONEL SAMUEL I. PARKER AND THAT OF ALL OUR VETERANS" ★

**Congressman Robin Hayes  
to the U.S. House of  
Representatives, 2006**

Parker survived many harrowing days of combat, emerging as the most highly decorated U.S. soldier of the Great War. However, that distinction did not belong to the heroic officer until May 7, 1936, when he received the Medal of Honor from President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the White House in Washington, D.C. Roosevelt presented the medal in the Oval Office with members of the Parker family and Army Chief of Staff Major General Malin H. Craig among those present. The ceremony occurred 18 years after Parker's heroic deeds, and the reason for the delay was perhaps bound up in lost paperwork, an administrative mishandling or some other error.

Parker was promoted to first lieutenant and served with the Allied occupation forces in Germany after hostilities ceased in 1918. He returned to the U.S. and was discharged from active military service on September 25, 1919. He joined the Army Reserve and reentered civilian life, working in the textile mills of North Carolina, not far from his hometown. During World War II, he was recalled to active duty and became involved with the training of soldiers at Fort Benning, Georgia. He taught an officer training course, wrote an infantry textbook titled *Combat Leadership*, and rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel. His other military awards include the Legion of Merit, World War I and World War II Victory Medals, World War II American Campaign Medal and unit recognition earned by the 28th Infantry Regiment.

Samuel Parker, known as "Si" to his family and friends, retired from the U.S. Army in 1945 and returned to work in the textile industry. He went on to serve as vice president of the National Council on Leadership and as the secretary-treasurer of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. He passed away at Walter Reed Army Medical Center on December 1, 1975, at the age of 84. On Veterans Day, November 11, 2021, a monument commemorating his gallantry in the service of his country was dedicated at Oakwood Cemetery in Concord, North Carolina, where he rests.





# ALL THE WORLD ABLAZE

Dragged into World War II by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. committed millions of brave men to the fight against the Axis. Many of them would etch their names into the annals of history through their selfless actions











# DIRK J. VLUG

Under heavy machine-gun fire, Private First Class Vlug took on five Japanese tanks in one of the most daring one-man assaults of WWII

WORDS: TOM FORDY

For most, the heroics and courage of World War II are remembered as we've seen them celebrated on the big screen: men of valor carrying out feats of immense bravery amid a barrage of explosions and gunfire, while the enemy advances in seemingly insurmountable numbers. Many real-life heroes would be made during World War II; few would be born from an act of such true cinematic-style spectacle as Private First Class Dirk J. Vlug, who in December 1944 destroyed five enemy tanks.

Dirk was born in Maple Lake, Minnesota, on August 20, 1916, to Dutch immigrants Isaac and Mina Vlug. He was almost 25 when he joined the army, enlisting at Grand Rapids, Michigan, in April 1944. By December that year he was among the men of the 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division, holding a roadblock as they moved south on the Ormoc Road in the Philippine province of Leyte.

The U.S. campaign in the Philippines—also known by the code names Operation Musketeer

I, II and III, and not to be confused with the French operation of the same name, which led to the Suez Crisis—had begun only two months earlier under the supreme commander of the Southwest Pacific theatre of operations, Lieutenant General Douglas MacArthur. The directive was clear: expel the Japanese Army. The Philippines had been under a brutal occupation since 1942, with Filipinos subjected to atrocities and forced into slave labour.

While the U.S. had a strong relationship with the Philippines, in truth it needed to be taken for its strategic positioning in the Southwest Pacific conflict—for both nations.

For Japan, keeping the islands meant holding key sea routes and ultimately survival in the war; for the U.S., taking the islands would be a crucial step in defeating the Japanese.

On October 20, 1944, the U.S. Sixth Army landed on the eastern shore of Leyte, beginning a sequence of clashes known as the Battle of Leyte Gulf. The Japanese forces underestimated the strength of the U.S. air and

naval forces, and ultimately the battle would end in a decisive victory for the U.S. From there, American troops advanced westwards across Leyte, heading for the Ormoc Bay area.

Regaining control of Ormoc Valley was crucial. It linked with Leyte Valley to the east via the Ormoc Road, a long and winding highway that ran through mountainous terrain and ravines. Once the valley was secured, it would ensure access from east to west and offer strong military defenses.

Despite resistance from the Japanese defensive units, the U.S. troops continued forward; further landings reinforced their numbers, while Filipinos supported these efforts. On December 10, they penetrated and took Ormoc City.

It was from this point that Vlug, along with the 126th and 127th Infantry Regiments of the 32nd Division, pushed south down the highway, with the aim of making a juncture with the XXIV Corps, squeezing the main defensive line of the Japanese 1st Division and ultimately securing the route between the two valleys.

Though the U.S. forces had been dominant so far, Vlug and the 32nd Division faced fierce opposition. Ridges and ravines covered in dense rainforest overlooked the highway from either side. The Japanese troops burrowed away at carefully selected defensive points, armed with heavily camouflaged machine guns and riflemen flanking the main artillery points.

Each bend in the road was more treacherous than the last: foxholes were carved into the embankments and spider holes dug under the roots of trees. With the steepness of the terrain and almost impenetrable rainforest, the Japanese were near impossible to spot beyond a distance of 75 feet. It is said American troops needed to be within “spitting distance” to identify and take out the machine guns.



President Truman congratulates five Medal of Honor recipients including Vlug (left of Truman)





Vlug is welcomed home during a parade in Grand Rapids, Michigan





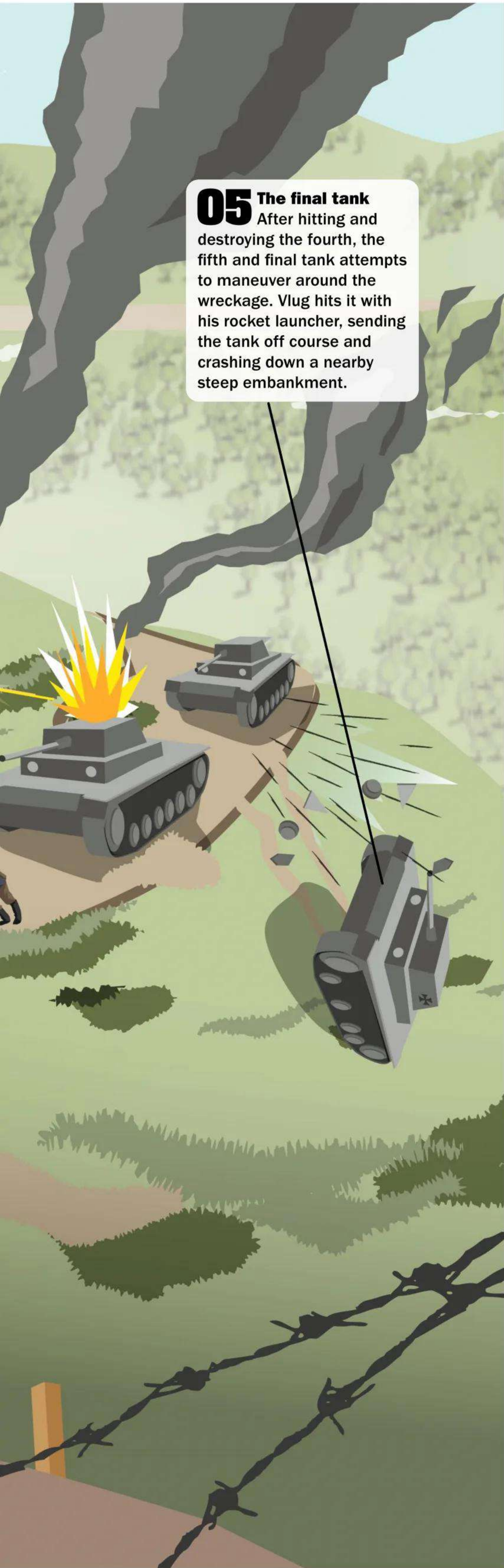
**02 The first tank** While the other U.S. troops take cover, Vlug takes a rocket launcher and leaves his position of safety. Under heavy fire from machine guns and 37mm cannons, he charges forward, arms the launcher and destroys the first tank.

**03 The pistol shot** After spotting Vlug, troops emerge from the second tank and fire at him. He pulls his pistol and shoots one dead. The others retreat back into the tank, which he quickly takes out with the rocket launcher.

**04 Taking the flank** As the three other tanks move forward, Vlug continues to advance under heavy fire and moves to the side. He is able to take out the third from a flanking position.

**01 The roadblock** The 32nd Division advances slowly south on the Ormoc Road, battling against tough resistance hidden under the cover of rainforest and mountainous terrain. After setting up a roadblock, five north-bound Japanese tanks approach.





**05 The final tank** After hitting and destroying the fourth, the fifth and final tank attempts to maneuver around the wreckage. Vlug hits it with his rocket launcher, sending the tank off course and crashing down a nearby steep embankment.

# “HE DISPLAYED CONSPICUOUS GALLANTRY AND INTREPIDITY ABOVE AND BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY... THROUGH HIS SUSTAINED HEROISM PFC VLUG FACILITATED SUCCESSFUL ACCOMPLISHMENT OF HIS BATTALION’S MISSION”

## Official citation for Vlug’s Medal of Honor

Regardless, Vlug and the 32nd Division made a slow advance south, sometimes gaining only 30 or 40 yards each day. On December 15, they set up a roadblock on the highway, where they were met by the advance of five Japanese tanks. In theory, the heavily armored vehicles should have cut right through them.

Had Vlug stopped to consider his actions, what followed might never have happened. One can only assume he acted on pure adrenaline and instinct, knocking out all five tanks in a matter of minutes.

The first tank laid a smokescreen ahead of its trajectory to conceal its movement, and from behind the screen came heavy machine-gun fire and relentless assault from 37mm cannons. The American troops took cover—all except Vlug, who grabbed a rocket launcher and six rounds of ammunition. Leaving his covered position, he charged toward the road by alone. The Japanese troops aboard the first tank saw Vlug and concentrated their machine-gun fire directly at him.

Undeterred by the hail of bullets, Vlug loaded the rocket launcher and destroyed the first tank. The second tank crunched to a stop and the troops dismounted, charging forward and opening fire on Vlug. Quickly, he pulled his pistol and opened fire, killing one of them and sending the rest fleeing back to the tank. Before they managed to get it moving forward again, Vlug struck them with his second rocket.

At this point the other tanks continued to roll forward, unleashing their firepower at Vlug. He maneuvered to the side and positioned himself on the flank of the third vehicle, from where he fired the launcher and took it out.

The remaining two tanks were now at close range. Despite being under continuous fire, Vlug pressed forward with his attack, destroying a fourth tank with the launcher and then hitting the fifth as it attempted to move around the burning wrecks of the others. Losing control, the fifth tank careered off the road, plummeting down a steep embankment.

In what proved to be an interesting footnote, Vlug took time after the incident to capture photographs of the tanks he had single-handedly destroyed. His actions would be a decisive factor in the success of his battalion’s mission. Both the 126th and 127th Infantry Regiments continued south on the highway, with their respective 1st and 2nd Battalions winning bitterly fought victories against the pockets of Japanese resistance along the way.

By December 21, the U.S. forces approaching from both the north and south met and closed the trap, ensuring that the Sixth Army took control of the all-important Ormoc Valley. The battle for Leyte came to a successful conclusion, while the overall liberation of the Philippines islands was all but finished by April, with small instances of resistance continuing until Japan’s surrender on August 15, 1945.

Following his return to U.S. soil, Vlug was awarded the Medal of Honor on June 26, 1946. After leaving the army, he joined the Michigan National Guard in May 1949 and retired six years later with the rank of master sergeant.

Dirk J. Vlug passed away in 1996 at the age of 79. He was laid to rest in Greenwood Cemetery in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he has a street named after him that runs adjacent to the Veterans Memorial Park.



Vlug poses next to one of the tanks he destroyed



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**“HE NEVER BARKED LIKE THE  
OTHER GUNNERY SERGEANTS  
BUT RULED LIKE A WISER,  
OLDER BROTHER LOOKING  
AFTER HIS YOUNGER SIBLINGS,  
WITH HUMOR AND A STYLE  
ALL HIS OWN”**

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**William Douglas Lansford,  
5th Marine Division**

*John Basilone became  
a celebrity in the U.S.  
after returning from  
Guadalcanal*





# JOHN BASILONE

The New Jersey champion boxer almost single-handedly repelled a Japanese onslaught and became a legend of the U.S. Marines

WORDS: JACK PARSONS

**J**ohn Basilone is considered a hero of the U.S. Marine Corps, however, there are few outside of the corps that now remember him. While he was alive, John was a national hero who was honored with parades and had highways, landmarks and even a destroyer warship named after him. He was the first marine to win a Medal of Honor during World War II and remains one of the most highly decorated marines of all time, also earning a Purple Heart and Navy Cross.

John was born into a big Italian family and grew up in Raritan, a small town in New Jersey. He was the sixth child of ten to Dora and Salvatore Basilone, who had emigrated to the United States from Naples in 1903. Aged 16, and against his mother's wishes, he dropped out of school and, always a keen sportsman, worked as a golf caddy for the local country club. However, this wasn't enough for him and in July 1934, aged 18, he enlisted in the U.S. Army. He served for three years with Company D, 16th Infantry, including a long stretch based in the Philippines. However, during his time in the army he achieved little, except proving that he was a champion light-heavyweight boxer—undefeated in 19 bouts.

Still, Basilone looked back on those formative years fondly, earning the nickname 'Manila John' because he talked about his experiences in the Philippines so much. Discharged from the army as a private first class, he worked for a few months as a truck driver in Maryland but soon hankered to return to Manila. Believing that joining the Marines would get him there faster than re-enlisting in the army, Basilone joined The Few, The Proud in 1940. But when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor a year into Basilone's training, his plans to return to the Philippines were scuppered.

Determined to stop the rapid Japanese territorial expansion that was threatening the supply routes between the U.S. and Australia, the Americans led the Allies' first offensive in the region. They landed on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands on August 7, 1942, and by surprising the Japanese they were able to seize an airstrip. However, the Japanese clung on tenaciously, with the so-called Tokyo Express (high-speed warships) delivering reinforcements every night to try and retake the island.

It was in the midst of one of these fierce counterattacks that Basilone entered Marine lore. Along with 4,157 others from the 7th Marine Regiment, Basilone formed part of an unbroken line of defense to keep the Japanese from reaching the Henderson Field airstrip. Known as the Lunga Perimeter, the Allies commanded a series of ridges that the Japanese would have to climb after traipsing through miles of dense jungle, muddy ravines and rivers. But this didn't deter them.

After already being beaten back at the battles of the Tenaru and Edson's Ridge, the Japanese

tried a new tactic. On October 12, 1942, engineers broke a 15-mile trail through the jungle to the Lunga Perimeter. Between October 16–18, the notorious 2nd Infantry Division of the Imperial Japanese Army, also known as the Courageous Division, began its march up this path; each soldier carried one artillery shell plus his pack and rifle. While the trail took several days longer than anticipated, forcing the troops onto half rations to compensate, when they finally attacked on the evening of October 23, they caught the U.S. troops unaware.

On the back foot, Allied forces were hastily rearranged, leaving Basilone and the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, left to hold the entire 2,500 yards of the perimeter east of the Lunga River. On the night of October 24, just after 9.30 p.m., a regiment of approximately 3,000 2nd Division Japanese soldiers descended on Basilone and the two gun crews of 15 men that he commanded. Basilone ordered them to allow the enemy to get within 30 yards and then "let them have it". This strategy successfully wiped out the first wave of attackers.



Marines cross the Matanikau River in Guadalcanal, 1942





**01 The first wave** When a regiment of 3,000 Japanese soldiers attacks, Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone is commanding two sections of machine guns, made up of just 15 men. Basilone orders them to wait for the enemy to get within 30 yards and then “let them have it”. The first wave of Japanese troops is annihilated.

**02 Firefight** Wave after wave of the enemy keep on coming, and the Marines soon suffer casualties. A mortar explosion kills or injures many of the gun crew, leaving just two to carry on fighting with Basilone. The gunnery sergeant responds by moving an extra gun into position and manning two at once.

**03 Battlefield repairs** In an explosion, two of the four heavy machine guns are damaged. One is beyond saving, but Basilone manages to repair the other while working in the dark using just his fingers. He then personally mans it, holding the line.

**05 ‘Virtual annihilation’** When the last of the ammo runs out shortly before dawn on the second day, Basilone fights off the rest of the Japanese soldiers using a .45 pistol and machete. When reinforcements arrive, they find the valley littered with bodies. Basilone’s Medal of Honor citation described his actions as “the virtual annihilation of a Japanese regiment”.





**04** **Running for ammo**  
Engaged in a 48-hour firefight, ammo eventually runs desperately low. Basilone knows there is an ammunition dump just 100 yards away, but it is behind enemy lines. Basilone runs and crawls through the jungle, dodging bullets, and manages to carry six heavy cartridge belts back to his remaining men. He later repeats this act, reaching an ammo dump that is 600 yards away.

**“HE CAME FROM NOTHING AND TO GREATNESS. I THINK THAT’S WHAT WE ALL HONOR: THE GUY THAT DIDN’T HAVE ANYTHING, THAT MADE IT. HE JUST RAN OFF AND BECAME A WORLD HERO. THE WHOLE COUNTRY HONORED HIM”**

**Clinton Watters, 5th Marine Division**

Fighting in the dark and in the midst of heavy rain, the U.S. forces were hammered with grenades, mortars and machine-gun fire. A mortar explosion killed or injured many of the gun crew, so only Basilone and two others were left to hold the line. Basilone responded by positioning a second machine gun and firing both at the enemy at once. They kept up this exhausting fight for 48 hours.

Inevitably, in such a long shootout, the machine gun ammunition began to run low, but the supply line had been breached and Japanese troops stood between Basilone and the ammunition dump. Certain that the position would fall if the gun teams were not resupplied, Basilone headed down the trail alone, fighting his way across 100 yards to the dump. After returning with several belts of ammunition, he set out for the unmanned gun pits to his right, knowing that the heavy weapons were essential to defending the ridge. However, when he got to the gun positions, he found the two unoccupied machine guns were jammed. Working in the darkness with only his fingers to guide him, he managed to fix one of the guns. He then used it to rain down heavy fire on the Japanese troops. At several points, the Marines were forced to push back the mounting bodies to maintain a clear field of fire.

As the battle raged on, facing eight separate waves of attack, Basilone was forced to make several more trips for the desperately needed ammunition. In the end, it’s believed Basilone’s platoon fired more than 25,000 rounds. Facing such vast numbers, few of the gunners survived. By the time reinforcements arrived, only Basilone and one other gunner held the ridge, with Basilone fighting with just a machete and .45 pistol. Fortunately for them, by this time the Japanese troops had been annihilated, the bodies of fallen soldiers filling the valley below. The rest of the 2nd Division’s attack was also pushed back, marking a turning point for the Allies.

*In his hometown Basilone is commemorated as the ‘hero of Guadalcanal’*

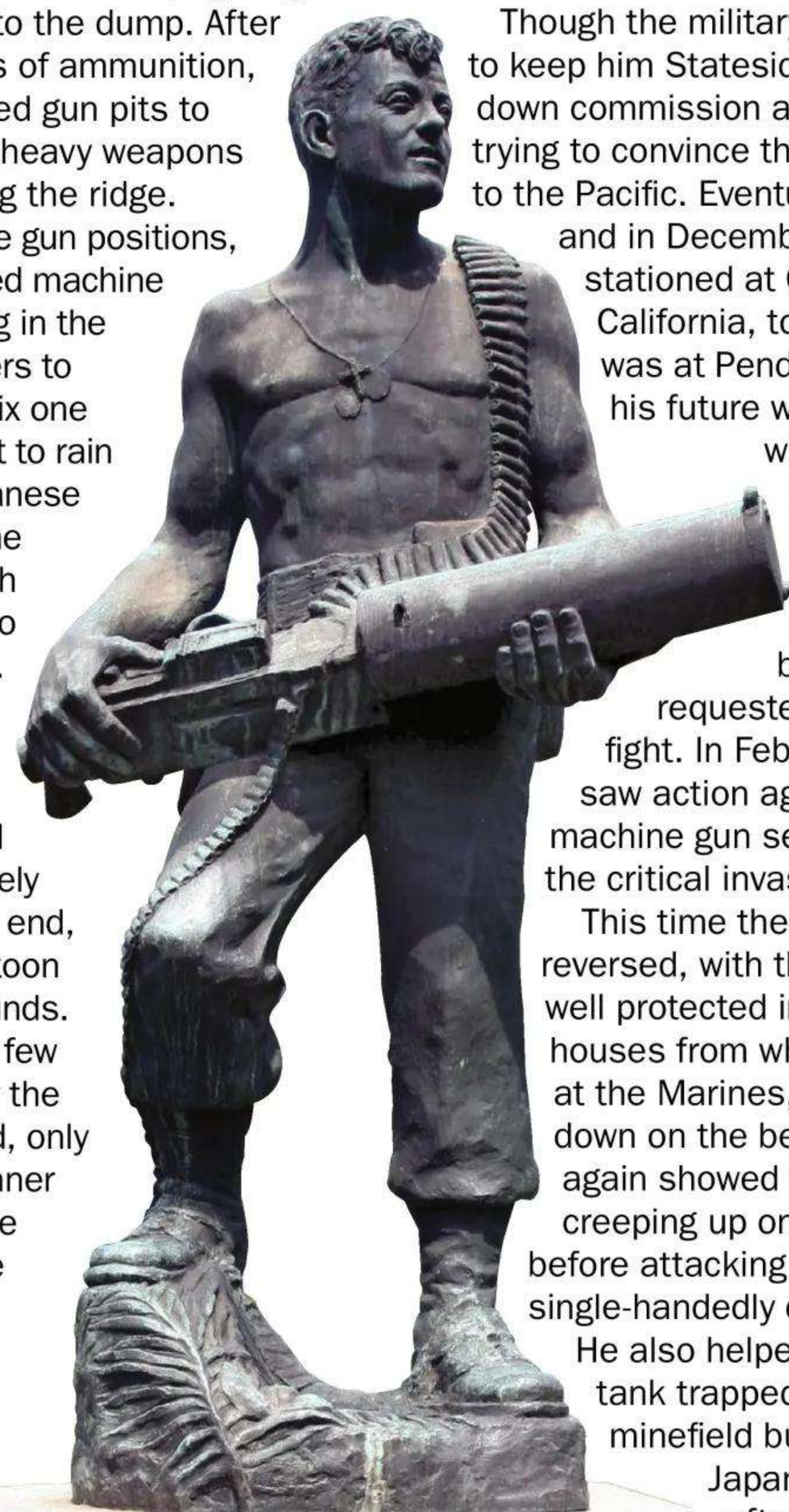
The Japanese eventually forfeited Guadalcanal that November.

In the light of the new day, Basilone was a war hero. Decorated with a Medal of Honor in Melbourne, Australia, he was shipped home to attend ticker tape parades and encourage Americans to ‘back the attack’ and buy war bonds. Met by a cheering crowd of 15,000 when he returned to his home town, he appeared in cinema newsreels alongside celebrities and traveled the country making speeches. Many soldiers might have been happy to enjoy their well-earned new fame and fortune, but in the words of Richard Greer, who had also been in the 7th Marines alongside Basilone, “He was a Marine, not a salesman.”

Though the military top brass wanted to keep him Stateside, Basilone turned down commission after commission, trying to convince them to return him to the Pacific. Eventually, they relented, and in December 1943 he was stationed at Camp Pendleton, California, to prepare for war. It was at Pendleton that he met his future wife, Lena Mae Riggi, who was a sergeant in the Marine Corps Women’s Reserve. They married the following July, but still Basilone requested to return to the fight. In February 1945 he saw action again, this time as a machine gun section leader during the critical invasion of Iwo Jima.

This time the situation was reversed, with the Japanese forces well protected inside fortified block houses from which they could fire at the Marines, who were pinned down on the beaches. Basilone once again showed tremendous courage, creeping up on the blockhouses before attacking them with grenades, single-handedly destroying a garrison.

He also helped free a stranded tank trapped on an enemy minefield but was killed by Japanese mortar shrapnel after guiding the vehicle over the hazardous terrain to safety. For his efforts, Basilone was posthumously awarded the Marine Corps’ second-highest decoration for valor, the Navy Cross.



JOHN BASILONE  
SERGEANT, U.S. MARINE CORPS  
HERO OF GUADALCANAL

BORN IN BUFFALO, N.Y. NOVEMBER 4, 1916  
ENLISTED FROM BUFFALO, N.Y. JULY 11, 1940  
AWARDED CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR  
FOR HEROIC ACTION ON OCTOBER 24, 1942  
VOLUNTEERED AGAIN FOR COMBAT DEC. 27, 1943  
KILLED IN ACTION ON IWO JIMA FEB. 19, 1945





# ROBERT H. MCCARD

This U.S. Marine Corps gunnery sergeant gave his life to save his tank crew during the fight for the Pacific island of Saipan in World War II

WORDS: MICHAEL E. HASKEW

**G**unnery Sergeant Robert H. McCard was 25 years old, a fine example of the dedicated, rock-solid non-commissioned officers that were the backbone of the United States Marine Corps. McCard did not wait for his country to enter World War II to become a Marine, enlisting three years earlier in December 1939.

By the spring of 1944, McCard was a combat veteran, a platoon sergeant in Company A, 4th Tank Battalion, 4th Marine Division, who had participated in the seizure of the island of Kwajalein in the Marshalls group that January. While the eyes of the world were on the events in Normandy as Allied soldiers assaulted Hitler's Fortress Europe, McCard was on the other side of the globe in the Pacific, engaged in a life-and-death struggle against the Japanese occupiers of Saipan, the administrative center of the Mariana Islands.

On the island road to the Japanese homeland, the Marianas were 1,200 miles from the enemy capital of Tokyo. For American war planners possession of the Marianas, including Saipan and two other large islands in the group, Guam and Tinian, meant staging areas for further progress toward victory. More importantly, in the short term it meant access to airfields that were large enough to accommodate the latest generation of U.S. strategic bomber, the Boeing B-29 Superfortress, and within striking range of Japan's home islands. The Superfortresses

would rain death and destruction, eroding Japan's will and capacity to wage war. The capture of the Marianas was code named Operation Forager. Its first significant assault at Saipan became Operation Tearaway.

In the stifling afternoon heat of June 16, 1944, D+1 of Operation Tearaway, McCard was buttoned up inside one of several M4A2 Sherman medium tanks along with the four members of his crew, advancing toward the eastern slope of an otherwise obscure ridge designated as the O-1 phase line, the initial objective of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 25th Marine Regiment, 4th Division. Their immediate mission was to silence a battery of four Japanese Type 88 75mm anti-aircraft guns that were actually dual-purpose, as they were also deadly against American tanks when depressed to fire horizontally.

When the order arrived for the tanks of the 4th Battalion to move forward they had been ashore on Saipan only a day. A thundering preparatory barrage of naval gunfire had commenced at 5.42 a.m. on the morning of June 15, and just over an hour later, as the rain of steel intensified, Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, commanding the amphibious forces, barked, "Land the landing force!"

Large transport craft known as LSTs (Landing Ship, Tank) moved into positions 1,250 yards behind the line of departure, and the Marines climbed down cargo nets into LVTs (Landing Vehicle, Tracked), amphibious vehicles that would churn toward the invasion beaches on

the island's western shore. At 8:40 a.m., the LVTs began their hazardous runs.

The reception awaiting the Marines of the 2nd and 4th Divisions was horrendous. Japanese artillery, mortar and small-arms boomed and crackled as they came ashore, and strong currents pushed some landing craft away from their assigned sectors. From concealed positions, the 23,000 Japanese defenders of Saipan unleashed a torrent of fire.

The 4th Tank Battalion attempted to come ashore at Saipan throughout the afternoon. Just getting ashore was an ordeal. Along with the challenges of a substantial coral reef and swift currents, the Japanese kept up a murderous fire, and the situation quickly became confused.

Underwater demolition teams had blown up obstacles and scouted the beaches for favorable areas for the tanks to come ashore. They recommended two methods. The first was to transit the channel leading to Blue Beach 1 and land the tanks directly on the shore from their LCMs (Landing Craft, Mechanized). The second, more hazardous option was to deposit the tanks on the coral reef offshore, primarily near Yellow Beach, which would require them to reach the beaches under their own power.

Company A was offloaded on the coral reef and forced to negotiate nearly 700 yards of churning water to reach Blue Beach 2, losing a pair of Shermans when they were swamped and saltwater rendered their electrical systems useless. A third was damaged as it tried to tow another tank ashore. Nearby, only four of



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**“SERIOUSLY WOUNDED...  
AND WITH HIS SUPPLY OF  
GRENADES EXHAUSTED,  
GUNNERY SERGEANT MCCARD  
DISMANTLED ONE OF THE  
TANK’S MACHINE GUNS AND  
FACED THE JAPANESE FOR  
A SECOND TIME TO DELIVER  
VIGOROUS FIRE...”**

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**Medal of Honor citation**

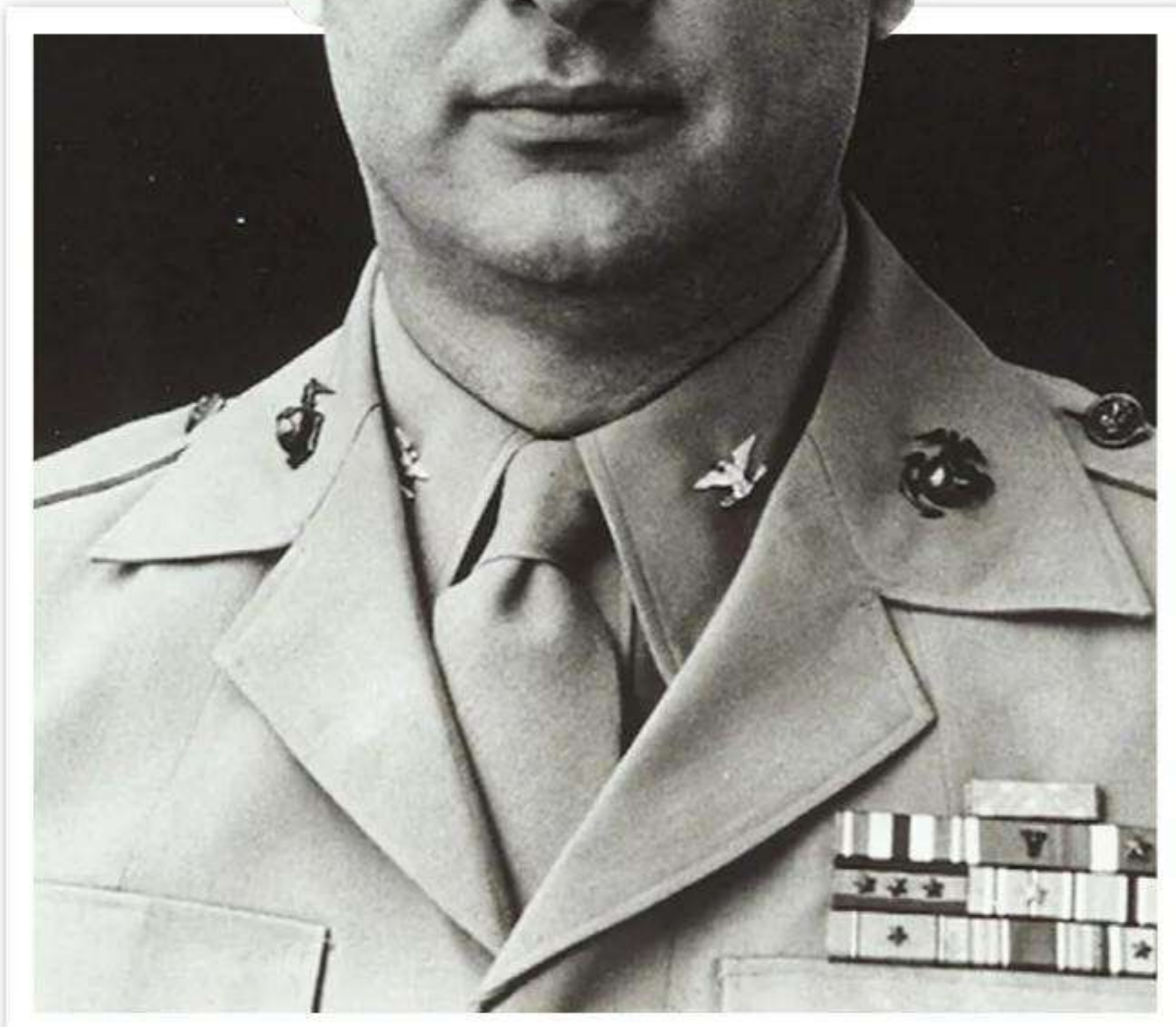
*Gunnery Sergeant Robert H.  
McCard received a posthumous  
Medal of Honor for his actions  
on Saipan during World War II*



★  
“MARINE SGT. ROBERT H. MCCARD, 33 [SIC],  
WAS KILLED IN ACTION IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC  
AREA, HIS WIFE, MRS. LISETTE MCCARD OF  
BELLEVILLE, HAS BEEN NOTIFIED”  
★

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, August 10, 1944, edition

A U.S. Marine flame-throwing  
tank attacks a Japanese pillbox  
on Saipan. In the mid-ground a  
Marine watches from a foxhole



Company B's 14 tanks reached the beach, some of them falling into offshore shell holes—unforeseen hazards excavated by the pre-invasion bombardment.

As soon as it was practical, the Company A tanks assembled and lumbered forward to support the 1st Battalion, 25th Marines, locked in combat near Agingan Point. Arriving just in time to help fend off an attack from two companies of Japanese infantry, the Shermans erupted with a curtain of fire from their 75mm main guns and their secondary .50-caliber and .30-caliber Browning machine guns, driving

into the exposed enemy flank. The attack was shattered, leaving countless Japanese bodies strewn across the ground.

The Shermans roared across Agingan Point, engaging bunkers and machine gun nests with devastating efficiency and allowing the 1st Battalion to continue its advance. No tanks were lost in the engagement, although one threw a track and became lodged in a crater. It was recovered hours later. Overnight, a Japanese counterattack attempted to wipe out the American beachhead but was repulsed with heavy losses.

On the morning of June 16 sluggish progress was made toward Aslito Airfield, a primary objective of the 24th and 25th Marines. As their

Left: Lieutenant Colonel Justice Chambers, who ordered the June 16, 1944, Saipan attack, received the Medal of Honor for heroism at Iwo Jima





*Left: Marines on Saipan take cover behind the protective hull of an M4 Sherman medium tank amid withering Japanese fire*

Type 88 guns and a pair of mountain howitzers that were lobbing shells into the area and making any activity hazardous.

At approximately 12.15 p.m., McCard and the rest of the 4th Tank Battalion buttoned up their Shermans, turret roofs painted fluorescent yellow for recognition from the air to prevent friendly planes from firing on them, and moved out. They would bring welcome firepower to the effort to clear the ridge and capture the airfield.

The tank-infantry teams went to work, swiftly silencing five machine gun nests, taking out the two mountain howitzers and killing about 60 Japanese soldiers. Company L then moved to assist the 2nd Battalion, 25th Marines, in the battle with the Type 88s and, as it was soon discovered, three more machine gun nests spewing deadly fire.

McCard's tank platoon headed up the eastern slope of the ridge as well. In the scramble his Sherman became separated from the others and was pounded by the Japanese guns. The tank was immobilized, isolated and silhouetted against the sky—a proverbial sitting duck. A tanker from Company C dodged 75mm rounds that hit the road in front of his Sherman and later remembered, "I'm shifting up gears, and I look off to the left and I could see a burning tank right on the skyline!"

That burning tank was McCard's, disabled but still full of fight. The crew returned fire with its own 75mm gun, and the tank's machine guns kept the Japanese infantry at bay, but enemy shells continued to slam into the Sherman. Time was running out. "Take off! Out the escape hatch!" McCard bellowed, and his crewmen slid out of the tank, dropped down into the mud and ran to safety.

From the turret, the tough gunnery sergeant peppered the enemy with hand grenades to cover their retreat. Grievously wounded, he ducked back inside the smoking Sherman and removed a coaxial .30-caliber machine gun before re-emerging to fire at the encroaching Japanese troops until he was finally overwhelmed and killed.

Before he died, McCard dispatched 16 Japanese soldiers and wounded several others. His heroism bought precious time for his fellow Marines, enabling them to escape. The enemy guns were later put out of action.

Saipan was declared secure on July 9 after more than three weeks of savage fighting. American dead, wounded and missing neared 14,000, and the Japanese garrison was virtually wiped out.

McCard's widow, Lisette, accepted his posthumous Medal of Honor from Rear Admiral Arthur S. Carpender, commander of the Ninth Naval District, at Centralia, Illinois, on April 10, 1945. The hero's citation incorrectly identifies the Japanese guns as 77mm but captures the spirit of his gallant sacrifice, reading in part, "Cut off from the other units of his platoon when his tank was put out of action... Gunnery Sergeant McCard carried on resolutely..."

Buried on Saipan, McCard's remains were exhumed in 1948 and reinterred in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu on the island of Hawaii.



*The rusting shell of an American M4 Sherman tank lies just off the beach at Saipan decades after the battle*

artillery swung into action against Japanese strongpoints, accurate counter-battery fire disabled numerous Marine howitzers, but most of these were back in action later in the day.

Slogging through swamps and dense jungle terrain, the Marines encountered heavy resistance, and the battalion commanders were soon radioing for tank support. Before

noon, Lieutenant Colonel Justice M. Chambers, commanding the 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines, called upon his infantrymen of Company L and six Shermans of Company A to eliminate harassing rifle fire from Japanese soldiers.

The enemy was hidden in the jungle surrounding an assembly area near the troublesome ridgeline along with the four 75mm

**"...I COULDN'T SEE THE GUNS. THE GUNS WERE NO DOUBT IN PITS... I THINK HE WAS RIGHT IN AMONGST THREE OF THEM"**

**Company C Marine, eyewitness**





# DESMOND DOSS

Running headlong into bullets and explosions at Hacksaw Ridge, this medic saved 75 lives one at a time, becoming the only soldier of World War II to earn a Medal of Honor without ever firing a gun

WORDS: HARETH AL BUSTANI

**W**hen the Empire of Japan launched its pre-emptive strike on Pearl Harbor at the end of 1941, a young Virginian called Desmond Doss was working at the Newport News shipyard. Though he was entitled to request a deferment, he felt a duty to serve his country and enlisted just months later.

It was an unusual move for a devoted member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, one who as a child had vowed never to kill. When Doss arrived at Camp Lee for training on April 1, 1943, as a skinny vegetarian with a fervent belief in pacifism, he quickly discovered that he'd landed in a world of trouble. While the other trainees perfected their marksmanship, he refused to even carry a weapon. This attitude infuriated Doss' fellow recruits to no end, with one even threatening, "Doss, as soon as we get into combat, I'll make sure you won't come back alive."

His commanding officers also believed a soldier without a gun was not only worthless but a liability. Desperate to drive him out, they bullied and harassed him ruthlessly, even trying to have him discharged for mental illness. Defiantly, Doss told Captain Jack Glover, "Don't ever doubt my courage because I will be right

by your side saving life while you take life," to which Glover replied, "You're not going to be by my damn side if you don't have a gun."

Although the Fourth Commandment required him to honor the Sabbath, Doss believed that serving as a medic would allow him to work



**Above:** Refusing to even hold a gun, Doss instead served a crucial role rescuing his fellow soldiers under the most dangerous circumstances

all week, as "Christ healed on the Sabbath". After the successful August 1942 landing at Guadalcanal, in the southwest Pacific, the Allies spent the next two years slowly reclaiming territory from the Japanese—with one army roping through the Solomon Islands and New Guinea into the Philippines and a second slogging across the Central Pacific Ocean, sweeping the Marshalls and then seizing the Marianas and Guam in the summer of 1944.

Doss served in Guam and then the Philippines with the 307th Infantry Regiment, 77th Infantry Division. Although he initially struck his comrades as puritanical, he soon won them over with his selflessness and devotion to duty. In the thick of battle he developed a fearless reputation for hurling himself into danger, dodging bullets and explosions to rescue wounded men—sometimes getting so close to enemy lines he could hear the Japanese soldiers whispering to one another. This commitment to duty not only earned Doss the respect of his fellow soldiers but two Bronze Stars.

As their empire crumbled around them, the Japanese grew increasingly desperate. Indoctrinated by an extreme nationalist version of the samurai warrior code, young soldiers were raised to see death as preferable to dishonor. Their emperor was a living god, and



*Desmond Doss' incredible story was retold in the 2016 film 'Hacksaw Ridge', which took \$180 million at the box office*



★  
“HE WAS ONE OF THE  
BRAVEST PERSONS  
ALIVE, AND THEN TO  
HAVE HIM END UP  
SAVING MY LIFE WAS  
THE IRONY OF THE  
WHOLE THING”

★  
Captain Jack Glover





the idea of allowing a foreign nation to conquer the Japanese archipelago, something neither China nor the Mongols had ever achieved, was completely unthinkable.

After the brutal battle for Iwo Jima (the only Pacific battle where American casualties exceeded Japanese) the Allies planned to seize Okinawa—the largest of the Ryukyu islands stretching south from Japan towards Taiwan. This would serve as a foothold from which to launch a bigger campaign for the subjugation of Japan.

Launching the largest amphibious assault of the Pacific campaign, the Allies made their first Okinawan landing on April 1. Surprised at the lack of resistance, they quickly took the Yontan and Kadena airfields. Before long, 60,000 American troops had poured into Okinawa, where 110,000 Japanese soldiers had set up defenses deep in the southern half of the island.

The further the Allies pushed, beneath artillery fire, typhoons and heavy rain, the harder the resistance became. The mountainous Okinawan landscape was merciless, and the Japanese had established extensive networks of defensive fortifications of tunnels, caves and pillboxes. It took the American 184th Infantry eight days, and 1,500 lives, to capture a crag known as The Pinnacle. While taking the island of Iejima, the 77th killed 4,700 Japanese soldiers. This included 1,500 civilians who had been armed and forced to fight by the Imperial forces—almost a third of its civilian populace.

The fiercest fighting took place along the Shuri-Yonburu Line, a string of defensive positions cutting Okinawa in half, centered on Shuri Castle. Built along a series of steep ridges and escarpments, these would require grit and resolve to overcome. After an enormous 27-battalion artillery barrage, with naval gunfire and

## “HIS NAME BECAME A SYMBOL THROUGHOUT THE 77TH INFANTRY DIVISION FOR OUTSTANDING GALLANTRY FAR ABOVE AND BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY”

### Medal of Honor citation

aircraft hammering the Japanese rear, the Americans launched a co-ordinated attack. By the end of the month, while some units had gained almost 1.5 miles of ground, the 96th Infantry Division was bogged down on its western flank by the 2.5-mile-long Urasoe–Mura Escarpment, which was defended by the Japanese 32nd Infantry.

Confronted by a sheer cliff face towering 400 feet high, American soldiers began to refer to the escarpment as Hacksaw Ridge. Too narrow to set machine guns atop it, the Japanese instead hunkered down in a series of caves, tunnels and pillboxes on the reverse side of the slope, waiting for the Americans to climb up—thereby transforming the peak into a hellish battleground of attrition.

On one occasion, the Americans formed a human ladder and tried to scale a giant monolith on the eastern end known as Needle Rock—only to be gunned down by machine-gun fire. The Americans responded by driving Japanese soldiers from their caves with flamethrowers and shooting them as they fled.

In just four days the 96th lost 536 men, pushing its numbers down to just 40 per cent fighting efficiency. On April 29, it was relieved by the 77th, just in time. In the ensuing days the 77th and the Japanese defenders engaged in endless attacks and counterattacks. The ridge became a living nightmare, where “all hell rolled into one”, a claustrophobic battlefield with a constant stream of grenade duels, night raids, satchel charging caves and hand-to-hand fights to the death. One American soldier even rushed into a Japanese machine-gun position with a grenade in his hand, blowing himself up alongside five enemies.

On another occasion the machine-gun fire was so intense that one soldier was completely decapitated.

On 2 May, spotting a wounded man 600 yards ahead, Doss ran into rifle and mortar fire to retrieve him. Two days later, when four men were cut down attacking a heavily fortified cave, Doss ran through a shower of grenades to reach them. There, he treated them 23 yards from the cave mouth before hauling them back under fire.

Three days later, Japan’s 32nd Army launched its only large counteroffensive of the

*The Americans suffered heavy casualties as they fought to dislodge the Japanese*

*Inset, right: Desmond Doss and his wife Dorothy at the White House*

© Alamy



© Getty





*With tanks unable to climb the ridge, American soldiers forced the Japanese out of their caves with flamethrowers, gunning them down as they fled*

campaign. That Sabbath day the Japanese rained down artillery, mortar and machine-gun fire upon the ridge, decimating the Americans and forcing them back down the cliff. In the aftermath, 75 were left for dead, crawling and clutching their wounds. Refusing to abandon them amid an endless hail of bombs and bullets, Doss ignored the order to retreat.

Instead, he single-handedly tended to the wounded, carrying them 100 yards towards the cliff face under constant fire. Once there he lowered them down using a makeshift litter on a rope, using double bowline knots and a tree stump for an anchor. As the fire continued he lowered between 50 and 75 wounded men to a safe spot 40 yards below before running back into the explosions and bullets to save more. Among them was Captain Glover, who had earlier tried to have Doss transferred.

Japan's attempted counterattack ended in a series of disastrous defeats, and the next day the Americans finally overran Hacksaw Ridge, where more than 3,000 Japanese soldiers had fought to the death. Two weeks later, during another battle, as his men took cover Doss continued treating the wounded until a grenade blew up near him, riddling his legs with shrapnel. Rather than risk another medic's life, he tended to his own injuries and waited five hours to be carried off on a litter. Upon spotting a soldier in worse shape, he jumped off and told his men to help him instead. While waiting for its return, he was shot in the arm by a Japanese soldier, and thinking on his toes, crafted a splint from a rifle stock before crawling 300 yards to safety.

After the bloody Battle of Okinawa, which the Japanese called the Rain of Steel, rather than

stage a costly invasion of the rest of Japan the U.S. dropped nuclear bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki—killing 105,000, most of them civilians. Japan finally surrendered on August 15, bringing the war to a close.

Although Doss was one of 25,000 conscientious objectors to serve in non-combat roles, he was the only one to be awarded a Medal of Honor, given to him by President Truman. Reflecting on the award, he said, "I feel that I received the Medal of Honor because I kept the Golden Rule that we read in Matthew 7:12: 'All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.'"

Doss spent five years in hospital recovering and later lost a lung to tuberculosis, leaving him unable to work. Instead, he devoted himself to working with young people on church-sponsored programs. He passed away in 2006 aged 87.







# HERSHEL 'WOODY' WILLIAMS

In February 1945, as U.S. Marines struggled to overcome Iwo Jima's relentless Japanese defenders, a 21-year-old corporal silenced seven pillboxes to help turn the tide of the battle

WORDS: ALEX BOWERS

**H**ershel Woodrow Williams' mind went as black as the beaches he had just stormed. Known affectionately as 'Woody', standing at a modest five foot six inches tall and having reached drinking age just a few months prior, he struck an unlikely figure to be thrust into the fray at a time of immense peril. It was February 23, 1945, and American forces were faltering on the infamous Japanese island of Iwo Jima. A series of reinforced concrete pillboxes stood in the way of securing the first of two main airfields a short distance from the shore, each individual position staunchly defended by troops prepared to die for their cause. The Marines needed to fight fire with fire, leaving Williams, armed with his flamethrower and accompanied by five comrades, with the chance to stand tall.

The odds had rarely been in his favor, yet he had defied them at almost every turn. Born in Quiet Dell, West Virginia, weighing 3.5 pounds, few had expected the infant boy to live. He nevertheless survived despite having already lost several siblings amid



*Above: Destroyed vehicles and American dead littered the shore after the Marines' assault faced fierce resistance from the Japanese*

the flu pandemic. Years later, his father succumbed to a heart attack and his widowed mother was forced to look after the family dairy farm by herself. Williams would go on to work numerous jobs, including a role with the Civilian Conservation Corps in which he

was engaged on a Montana-based project when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. While personally compelled to serve like countless other fellow Americans, Williams had no wish to join his brothers in the U.S. Army, believing that the brown uniforms were ugly; instead, he had his sights on the dress blue of the Marine Corps. Then aged 17, however, he needed his mother to sign his permission papers, something she wasn't prepared to do. He had no choice other than to wait until he turned 18, but even that wouldn't be enough in the eyes of military regulations because he didn't meet the Marines' height regulations. Only in 1943, when these requirements were reduced, was Williams able to enlist and adorn the coveted blue uniform.

He began his initial training in San Diego, California, before being deployed to the 3rd Marine Division on Guadalcanal in January 1944. There, he was selected to become a demolition flamethrower operator. His first experience of combat came during the Second Battle of Guam in July–August 1944. He would stay on the island until February



HERSHEL 'WOODY' WILLIAMS

*Williams used flamethrowers to destroy enemy gun emplacements and clear a path for his comrades during the U.S. assault on Iwo Jima*

★  
"AS FAR AS I WAS  
CONCERNED, I WAS JUST  
DOING A JOB"  
★

Hershel 'Woody' Williams



1945, at which point his unit—C Company, 1st Battalion, 21st Marine Regiment—was shipped out to a then-undisclosed location. Their next objective would soon be revealed as Iwo Jima, a Japanese territorial island some 745 miles south of Tokyo; it was a mere eight square miles and, as Williams’ companions and others would remark, resembled the shape of a pork chop. It was to become a pork chop that would crackle and burn throughout five weeks of intense fighting to dislodge the 23,000-strong Japanese forces that had transformed Iwo Jima into a fortress.

The Marines landed on February 19, with Williams’ unit in reserve. But such was the carnage faced by the men, almost 2,500 of whom became casualties on the first day, that reinforcements were required almost immediately. Williams found himself traversing the beaches of black volcanic sand on February 21, surrounded by blown-up jeeps, burnt-out tanks and American dead wrapped in their ponchos, their bodies stacked in lines on the dark sand. Speaking to *History of War* in a 2020 interview, Williams said of the scene, “It was very sobering; I’ve never been able to eradicate those thoughts.”

Despite the horrific carnage, hope came on February 23 when he witnessed the Stars and Stripes flying above the nearby Mount Suribachi—but little did he know that the events of the next few hours would change his life forever.

An NCO meeting was to be held in a huge shell crater, which Williams’ commanding officer insisted he attend in the capacity of acting sergeant. The discussion centered around the enemy pillboxes that remained

★

**“[WILLIAMS’] UNYIELDING DETERMINATION AND EXTRAORDINARY HEROISM IN THE FACE OF RUTHLESS ENEMY RESISTANCE WERE DIRECTLY INSTRUMENTAL IN NEUTRALIZING ONE OF THE MOST FANATICALLY DEFENDED JAPANESE STRONG POINTS ENCOUNTERED”**

★

**Medal of Honor citation**

active on the other side of the airfield—targets that needed to be silenced to secure the site. Attention turned to Williams, who volunteered his flamethrower-operating skills. “I’ll try,” the native West Virginian declared as he mustered four men to protect him with covering fire and another ‘charge pole’ man, wielding a literal pole topped with demolitions, to finish the job. The plan was relatively straightforward but a great deal could still go wrong.

Much of what happened next was a violent blur for Williams. Not long after venturing

forward into a hail of bullets, his demolitions expert took a hit to the helmet that knocked him out of the action. At some point in the struggle he also lost two of his riflemen—both killed—and so Williams continued the assault with only two remaining companions. When he reached one of the pillboxes, he inserted the flamethrower nozzle into it and lit up the structure with a fiery blaze, incinerating everyone within. Ditches between the enemy positions enabled him to crawl between them, offering limited protection from small-arms fire over his head. Later, he recalled hauling himself over the sand on top of another pillbox, spying a vent pipe, and sending flames shooting down. In another instance, he stopped a Japanese bayonet charge against him by torching his assailants.

Williams returned to American lines time and again to retrieve more flamethrowers, using six in total before running back to eliminate yet another pillbox. Finally, thanks to his outstanding performance in clearing seven gun emplacements, a clear route could be opened to allow fellow Marines to get in behind the last strongholds.

“The CO told us to move forward and we carried on fighting as though nothing had happened,” said Williams. “As far as I was concerned I was just doing a job.”

As far as anyone else was concerned, Acting Sergeant Hershel W. Williams had gone above and beyond the call of duty, putting his life on the line to ensure the day’s ultimate success. His Medal of Honor citation reads in part, “[Williams’] unyielding determination and extraordinary heroism in the face of ruthless enemy resistance were directly instrumental

*U.S. Marines in foxholes on the southeast edge of Motoyama Airfield No. 1, Iwo Jima, on February 23, 1945—the same day Williams’ heroics took place*







*Above left: Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi paid their respects to Williams as he lay in honor at the U.S. Capitol Rotunda*

*Above: Williams lay in honor on July 14, 2022. He was the last surviving WWII recipient of the Medal of Honor*

*Williams' legacy extends to a medical facility and warship named after him. His original medal is held at the Pritzker Military Museum & Library in Chicago*



in neutralizing one of the most fanatically defended Japanese strong points encountered by his regiment and aided vitally in enabling his company to reach its objective.”

Williams would continue to showcase these attributes as the Marines battled their way through Iwo Jima's unforgiving northern terrain. On March 6, 1945, the soon-to-be recipient of the United States' highest military award was wounded in the left leg by a piece of shrapnel. Refusing to be evacuated so that he could help newly arrived Marines, he took the metal shard as a trophy and fought on with a limp.

The Iwo Jima campaign concluded on March 26, after which Williams was redeployed to Guam and commenced training for the proposed invasion of Japan before the atomic bomb detonations over Hiroshima and Nagasaki brought an end to the war. But what had taken place on that volcanic island

remained seared into the memories of the surviving veterans, not least Williams, whose Medal of Honor—presented by President Harry S. Truman at the White House on October 5—he would dedicate to Corporal Warren H. Bornholz and Private, First Class Charles G. Fischer, the two riflemen who had laid down their lives to protect him. Including Williams, 27 Medals of Honor were awarded for the incredible bravery seen on Iwo Jima, many of them posthumous. The battle cost 26,000 American casualties—of the 6,821 killed 5,931 were Marines. Meanwhile, of the island's 22,000 Japanese defenders, 20,000 were dead or missing.

Williams spent a total of 20 years in the Marine Corps and Marine Corps Reserve during and after the war. Outside of the armed service he would dedicate 33 years as a Veterans Service Representative with the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, as

well as almost ten years as the commandant of a West Virginia veterans nursing home. Perhaps his proudest achievement was the establishment of the Woody Williams Foundation, which to this day supports Gold Star families whose loved ones have made the ultimate sacrifice.

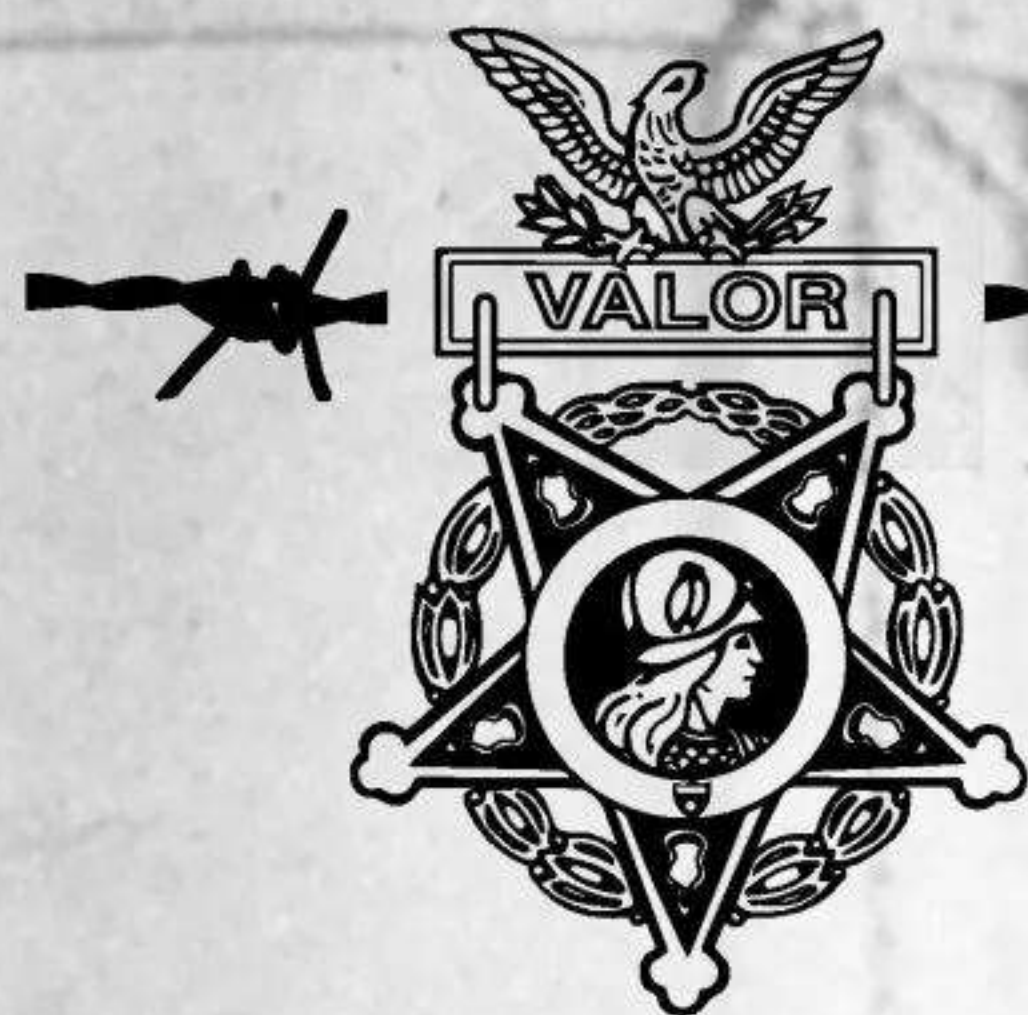
Williams passed away on June 29, 2022, aged 98. On July 14 his remains lay in honor at the U.S. Capitol Rotunda where, in a rare display of bipartisanship, politicians from both sides of the aisle gathered to pay their respects to a national hero.

Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell stated, “Our nation was richly blessed by the life of Woody Williams,” while Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said of the American hero, “At just five-foot-six, he was never the tallest Marine. At 135 pounds, never the biggest. Yet he was a force of nature on the battlefield.”



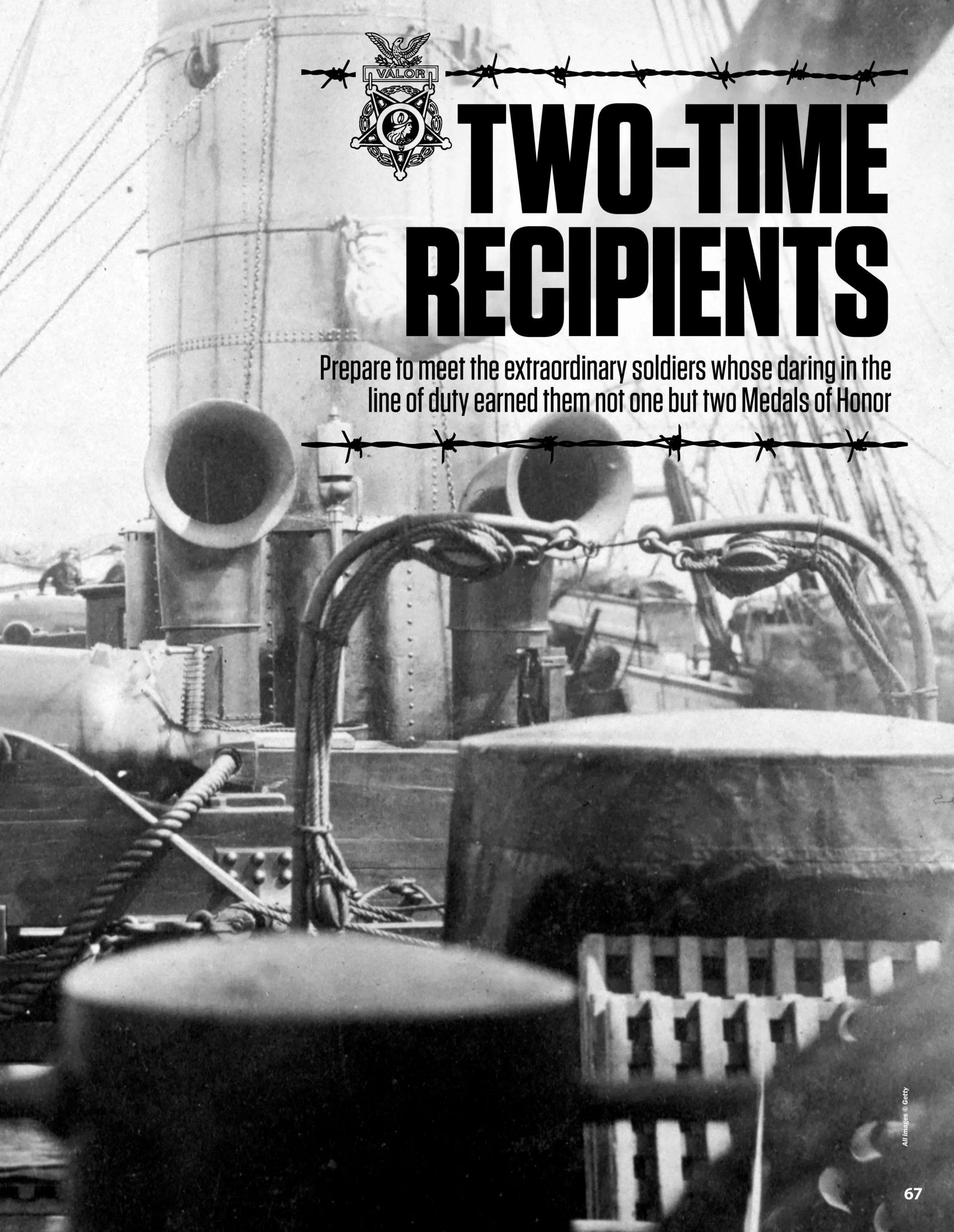






# TWO-TIME RECIPIENTS

Prepare to meet the extraordinary soldiers whose daring in the  
line of duty earned them not one but two Medals of Honor







# DANIEL DALY

A veteran of some of the bloodiest conflicts of the 20th century, Sergeant Major Daniel Daly has become a U.S. Marine legend

WORDS: DOM RESEIGH-LINCOLN

**L**ike many individuals who would survive the much-photographed and filmed wars of the 20th century, Daniel Daly cared little for the fame or legacy his actions brought him. He was, up until his death on April 27, 1937, a man who saw medals as “foolishness”, but his actions during the Siege of International Legations in China and a bloody battle in Haiti more than a decade later have made him a legend in the annals of the U.S. Marine Corps.

Born on November 11, 1873, Daniel Joseph Daly was raised in Glen Cove, New York. A city now but a small village at the time, Glen Cove had blossomed from a diminutive port for English traders in the 1600s to a thriving holiday resort community for New York City residents. The young Daly, like many boys at the time, spent most of those youthful years getting into trouble. He often worked as a newsboy, before turning his fists to better use as a semi-professional boxer. Daly himself was never too open about the particulars of his childhood, but one thing was certain: his life didn't truly begin until he enlisted in the U.S. military on January 10, 1899.

So what had brought Daly from a rough and tumble life on the streets of NYC to the U.S. Marine Corps? The answer was simple: the Spanish-American War. When U.S. forces intervened in the bloody Cuban War for Independence (which had remained under Spanish control for centuries), war was declared to decide the fate of the Cuban people. Daly, hungry for the chance to see action, enlisted and was shipped off to Brooklyn Navy Yard—but the war lasted barely ten weeks and was over by the time Daly emerged from training.

Now a private, Daly was deployed aboard the U.S.S. Newark in May 1900. China was

in the grip of the Boxer Rebellion, an anti-Christian and anti-West movement that had driven hundreds of civilians and soldiers into the Legation Quarter of Peking (now Beijing). The Boxers, supported by the ruling Qing government, laid siege to the city, so an international relief effort was organized. Daly was bound for Taku Bay, where he would meet up with the rest of the U.S. Marines and march towards the capital.

*Below: Daly remains one of the U.S. Marine Corps' most decorated soldiers, having won the Medal of Honor twice and the Distinguished Service Cross*



The U.S. Marines, along with German forces, were positioned on the Tartar Wall that surrounded the entire city. Chinese attacks eventually forced the Germans off the wall on June 30, leaving the small contingent of Marines behind to defend it on their own. The Qing soldiers and Boxer rebels were relentless, and it seemed the wall would eventually fall. On August 14, with the wall itself in disarray, it was clear it needed to be repaired if it were to be held any longer.

Daly volunteered to defend it, crawling on his own to a vantage point and using his bolt-action Lee rifle to hold back the advancing Chinese soldiers. Legend says Daly killed almost 200 enemy combatants single-handedly that day—while hearsay has likely exaggerated that number, it is believed that the real number would have still been quite considerable.

His actions didn't go unnoticed by his superiors and he was rewarded with the most prestigious honor the U.S. military could bestow—the Medal of Honor—in 1901. His second commendation for the medal came 15 years later as he and his fellow Marines stared into the jaws of death during the U.S. invasion and occupation of Haiti.

Between 1911 and 1915, the government of Haiti changed a staggering six times, all of which had been facilitated by coups by ‘cacos’ (separatist rebels based in the mountains to the north of Haiti). The U.S. Government had also become concerned with the influence that Germany was having over the region, helping accelerate certain coups in order to gain valuable trade agreements. By 1915, the country was in a state of perpetual chaos—in response, the Haitian-American Convention was ratified, which saw the last remnants of the pro-U.S. Haiti Government handing over de facto security of the country to the U.S.



*Despite his diminutive size (he was five foot four inches in height and about 132 pounds in weight), Daly struck a powerful and authoritative figure in the Marine Corps*

★

**“THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, IN THE NAME OF CONGRESS, TAKES PLEASURE IN PRESENTING THE MEDAL OF HONOR (SECOND AWARD) TO GUNNERY SERGEANT DANIEL JOSEPH DALY FOR EXTRAORDINARY HEROISM IN ACTION”**

★

Official citation for Sergeant Major  
Daly's second Medal of Honor





**02 Retreating to higher ground** Daly, Butler and the rest of the Marines (one of who is now wounded) retreat back to higher ground, leaving all their dead horses and the one machine gun they had brought with them behind. They hunker down and attempt to hold off the advancing rebels.

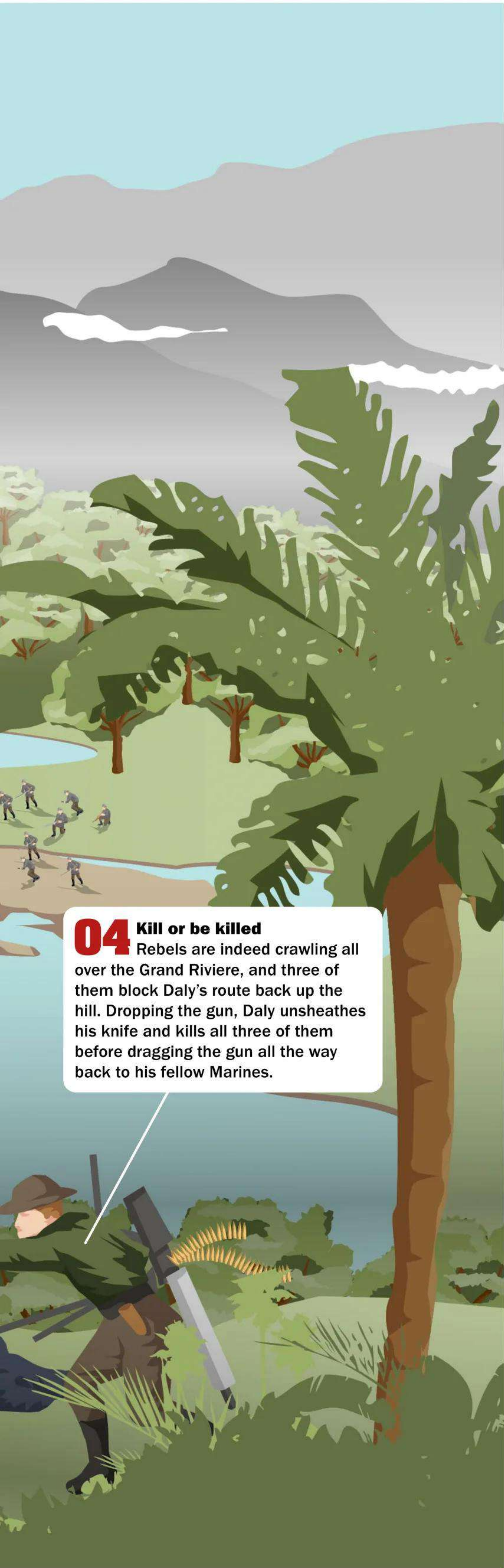
**05 Countering the attack** With Daly and the machine gun back among the Marines, Butler orders a counterattack. The Marines split into three groups, driving the cacos back towards the Grand Riviere. About 75 rebels are killed by the end of the battle, with Daly, Butler and the Marines going on to overrun Fort Dipitie.

**01 Scout and ambush** Under the command of Major Butler, Daly and about 40 other Marines depart from the nearby Fort Liberte with the intention of scouting out and potentially overrunning the Haitian-controlled Fort Dipitie. However, 400 cacos rebels are patrolling the web of rivers in between and trap the marines in an ambush.

**03 Returning to the ambush** With Butler and the other Marines fighting off the rebels, Daly leaves the embankment on his own and sneaks back to the site of the original attack. He cuts the straps holding the machine gun to the dead horse and hoists it on his back, knowing the road back will be littered with rebels.

Ed Crooks





★  
**“COME ON, YOU SONS OF B\*\*\*HES,  
 DO YOU WANT TO LIVE FOREVER?”**  
 ★

**Daniel Daly, June 1918**

Now a gunnery sergeant, Daly was well into his second decade of military service when the call to sail to Haiti was sounded. The United States was to occupy the country and restore order, but it wouldn't be an easy task—the same cacos that had reformed the government by force so many times in the past weren't going to stand idly by while U.S. forces 'invaded' their homeland.

By October 24, 1915, the attempts to restabilize the Dominican Republic's neighbor continued to falter as the Haitian rebels fought the U.S. forces at every turn. Gunnery Sergeant Daly was now stationed at a military outpost known as Fort Liberte under the command of future Medal of Honor awardee Marine Major Smedley Butler. Smedley planned to scout out and destroy a nearby Haitian outpost, Fort Dipitie, which was separated from Liberte by a web of small rivers known as the Grand Riviere. A group of about 40 Marines, including Daly, were tasked with crossing the rivers to conduct reconnaissance with a set of horses and a single machine gun.

However, the rebels were already guarding the Grand Riviere, and the 400-strong contingent of cacos soldiers unleashed their ambush in the middle of their mission. The location itself was a bowl of sorts with the rebels holding higher ground. Daly and the other men returned fire, but the rebels had the advantage. One of the Marines had been injured and the machine gun had been lost, the horse beneath shot dead by a rebel bullet. The Marines pulled back to higher ground and hunkered down, returning fire at the approaching rebels.

The cacos attacked again a few hours later, intending to slaughter the Marines before they could return to the safety of Fort Liberte. As the cacos continued to blanket the Marines with fire, Daly once again volunteered to do the near impossible: recover the lost machine gun. Without it, the Marines wouldn't survive. In other words, if the rebels didn't shred the Americans with bullets, their bayonets would make short work of them at close range.

Daly, still under fire from the rebels, snuck away towards the site of the original ambush while his fellow Marines continued to hold the Haitians back. He then cut the machine gun from the back of the dead horse, heaved it onto his back and carried it single-handedly back to the battle. On his way, he was attacked by three rebels, but Daly wasn't going to go down without a fight—he killed every last one with nothing but a knife before making his way back. With the machine gun set up in their position, Daly and the Marines were able to drive back the rebels.

With the machine gun making all the difference, Major Butler ordered a counterattack at first light on October 25. The Marines, sensing the changing tide, charged the group, splitting into three groups and attacking the retreating rebels. A total of 75 cacos were killed by the end of the battle, and the collapse of the attack eventually led to the fall of Fort Dipitie and a victory during the Battle of the Grand Riviere that followed.

Daly would go onto play an equally vital role in World War I—his actions against the Germans during the Battle of Belleau Wood in 1918 once again inciting devotion in his men. He was said to have uttered the iconic line, “Come on, you sons of b\*\*\*hes, do you want to live forever?” While Daly himself insisted that he actually shouted “for Christ's sake men, come on! Do you want to live forever?” the phrase became something of a mantra for the U.S. Marine Corps.

Daly was awarded his second Medal of Honor for his valor in Haiti and the Distinguished Service Cross for his courage in France in 1918. By the end of his military career in 1929, he had become one of the most decorated soldiers in U.S. military history and a legend in the long timeline of the U.S. Marine Corps.

*Below: A U.S. soldier stands guard in the American sector in Tientsen, northern China, during the Boxer Rebellion, which claimed over 100,000 lives*







★  
"MAJOR BUTLER WAS EMINENT  
AND CONSPICUOUS IN  
COMMAND OF HIS BATTALION"

★  
Smedley Butler's commendation for  
the Medal of Honor, April 22, 1914





Two-time recipients

# SMEDLEY BUTLER

Major General Butler dedicated his life to serving his country, and his experiences in the heat of battle gave him a unique perspective on war

WORDS: MICHAEL E. HASKEW

**C**haos reigned on the approach to the town of Tientsin. At the height of the Boxer Rebellion, a multinational military contingent was intent on protecting the international legation in the Chinese capital city of Peking from marauding revolutionaries.

Lieutenant Smedley Butler of the U.S. Marines crouched as Boxer bullets whined around him. When Butler saw a fellow officer grievously wounded, however, he had to act. Sprinting from the safety of a trench, Butler reached the stricken officer only to be shot in the leg himself. Another brave Marine rushed to them, and he, too, was wounded. Miraculously, the three Marines dragged themselves to safety.

When the successful Gaselee Expedition had concluded, Butler's mentor and commanding officer, Major Littleton Waller, recommended him for the Medal of Honor for gallantry on July 13, 1900. While four enlisted men did receive their nation's highest honor for Tientsin, Butler was not eligible since he was a commissioned officer. Instead, he became one of only 20 Marines to receive the Marine Corps Brevet Medal for heroism. The Brevet Medal was not authorized until 1921, and the decoration was presented to Butler soon afterwards.

In Butler's case, the Brevet Medal was equivalent to the Medal of Honor, and it marked a career that would include an extraordinary award of the actual Medal of Honor on two occasions, as well as one of the most controversial military perspectives in U.S. history. Butler served in the U.S. Marine Corps for three decades, and during that time he participated in numerous actions during the

Spanish-American War, the so-called Banana Wars and World War I period.

The son of Quakers, Butler shook off his pacifist upbringing at the age of 16, lied about his age and enlisted in the Marine Corps in the spring of 1898. His father, Thomas Butler, served as a U.S. Congressman from Pennsylvania for more than 30 years and at times had a hand in the future of his military-minded son.

Butler served in Guantanamo, Cuba, and aboard the armored cruiser U.S.S. New York during the Spanish-American War, and after contemplating separation from the service, he accepted a Marine Corps 1st lieutenant's commission in early 1899. Spain had ceded the Philippines to the U.S. when the war ended, and Butler was assigned to a post in Manila. Long periods of boredom led to a flirtation with alcoholism.

**Below:** Young officer Smedley Butler (sitting far right) with other Marine Corps officers during their time in Veracruz, Mexico



© Wikimedia Commons



## TWO-TIME RECIPIENTS

*Butler inspecting a Marine barracks in Shanghai, China, in 1914*



The defining moment of Butler's military future occurred in October when he commanded 300 Marines assigned to take the town of Noveleta from Filipino soldiers. When the rifles crackled, Butler was briefly unnerved. It was his first time under fire, but the young officer collected himself and led his command to victory, even though his first sergeant had been shot while close by and one Marine was killed along with ten wounded.

Within a few months Butler was hand-picked by Major Waller to join the expedition to China. Waller wrote a glowing report of Butler's conduct during the Gaselee Expedition while recommending a medal "...for the admirable control of his men in all the fights of the week, for saving a wounded man at the risk of his own life, and under a very severe fire". The budding hero was promoted to brevet captain.

Butler was a career Marine officer during a period of regular U.S. intervention in the domestic affairs of Latin American countries. He served in numerous expeditions during the early years of the 20th century and came to the conclusion that such interventions,

and subsequently the deaths, wounds and illnesses suffered by American forces, were the horrendous consequences of the government's determination to preserve and extend American business interests. He was destined to become a champion of anti-war activism, but ironically he received two Medals

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**"I SPENT MOST OF MY TIME BEING A HIGH-CLASS MUSCLE MAN FOR BIG BUSINESS, FOR WALL STREET AND FOR THE BANKERS. IN SHORT, I WAS A RACKETEER FOR CAPITALISM"**

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Major General Smedley Butler

of Honor upon retirement from the Marine Corps in 1931.

After his baptism of fire in the Philippines, Butler was detailed to Puerto Rico in 1903. Amid rumors of a burgeoning revolution in Honduras, he was ordered to that country in support of a naval show of force. Leading his men ashore, Butler noted that the mere presence of U.S. Marines seemed to quell the violence. When ordered to protect the American consulate in the city of Trujillo, the Marines marched in. A firefight between government troops and rebels ceased at the sight of them.

The American consul was found wrapped in a U.S. flag and hiding under the floorboards of his office, and it was during this period that Butler received a colorful nickname. Already known for a glaring stare, he was apparently suffering from an illness that made his eyes more bloodshot than usual. His Marines gave him the moniker of "Old Gimlet Eye".

Butler then served in Nicaragua, and although ill he participated in skirmishes while commanding a Marine battalion. At the same



time his distrust of government intentions continued to grow. In 1914, the U.S. and Mexico were edging towards war, and Major Butler conducted a covert assessment of Mexican preparedness, snooping across the capital of Mexico City. Marines were ordered to intercept the delivery of a large quantity of munitions at Veracruz, and sporadic fighting erupted in the streets. As nearly 6,000 Marines had come ashore in Mexico, the conflict intensified.

On April 22, 1914, Butler distinguished himself during the occupation of Veracruz and was recommended for the Medal of Honor, which was awarded on December 4, 1915. The citation read in part, "...Major Butler was eminent and conspicuous in command of his battalion. He exhibited courage and skill in leading his men through the action of the 22nd and in the final occupation of the city."

The next year, Butler and a contingent of Marines were dispatched to Haiti aboard the battleship U.S.S. Connecticut. The Haitian President had been killed during a riot, and shortly after the Americans landed in late October they were ambushed by a force of Haitian rebels (known as cacos) nearly ten times their number. The 44 Marines held their line during a restless night and threw the rebels back in disorder the next morning. By late November numerous fortifications and strongpoints had been taken, but Fort Riviere, an old French post, had to be stormed.

Butler led 700 Marines in capturing the fort on November 17, 1915. After discovering a small opening in the fort's southern wall and slipping inside along with his men, a brutal hand-to-hand fight against the rebels ensued. Brutal but brief; within 20 minutes Fort Riviere was in the hands of the Marines. Fortunately for Butler and his men only one American had been injured in the skirmish (by a thrown rock) while 50 Haitians lay dead.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy and future President of the United States, recommended Butler for the Medal of Honor, the citation reading, "...Major Butler gave the signal to attack and Marines from the 15th Company poured through the breach, engaged the cacos, took the bastion, and crushed the cacos resistance."

To his dismay, Butler was not recommended for combat command when the U.S. entered World War I. He was promoted to brigadier general and given charge of Camp Pontanezen, a troop depot at the port of Brest, France. He attempted to return his Medal of Honor presented for Veracruz with the bold statement that he had done nothing worthy of it. However, he was instructed to keep the medal. In France, Butler discharged his duties capably, but his convictions regarding the nature of modern war became entrenched. Later, he took command of the Marine Corps base at Quantico, Virginia, and was commended for his administrative skill.

In the mid-1920s, Butler took a leave of absence from the Marine Corps at the request of W. Freeland Kendrick, mayor of Philadelphia, and became the city's director of public safety. He waged a campaign of suppression against crime in the city and strictly enforced Prohibition laws. However, by the time his tenure concluded in 1926, he had raised the ire of the mayor and other officials. Although he had accomplished his task to a great extent, his direct style and fiery independence had resulted in great acrimony.

Butler was promoted to major general but passed over for the prestigious post of Marine Corps commandant. Partially to blame were his highly publicized rancor with Philadelphia's local government and his public recounting of "gossip" regarding Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. When he told the story that Mussolini had committed a

hit-and-run with his automobile and a child had been killed, Butler was actually arrested and subjected to court-martial. That episode ended with only a reprimand.

In 1934, Butler publicly claimed that he had been approached by a group of conspirators to seize power in a coup d'etat, overthrowing President Roosevelt. Some of his testimony before a Congressional inquiry related to the "Business Plot" was validated, but the actual existence of the conspiracy was never proven.

Even as these events unfolded, Butler's belief that warfare was an instrument of government collusion to further the interests of big business never wavered. He became more vocal as the years progressed, lecturing on the anti-war perspective and supporting leftist political endeavors. In 1935, he wrote a short treatise titled *War Is A Racket* and decried that its "...profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives". He also commented, "I served in all commissioned ranks from second lieutenant to major general. And during that period I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle man for big business, for Wall Street and for the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism. I suspected I was just part of the racket all the time. Now I am sure of it."

For his stance on warfare, Major General Smedley Butler received both praise and scorn. Continuing to argue against armed conflict, he returned to his native Pennsylvania after retiring from the Marine Corps. He subsequently fell terminally ill and died, most likely of cancer, at age 58 on June 21, 1940.

At the time of his death Butler was perhaps the most controversial figure to wear an American military uniform. He was also the most highly decorated Marine of his era. He is rightly remembered for his daring on the battlefield and for his firmly held opinions regarding the military-industrial complex off it.

**Below:** General Butler leads a parade of U.S. Marines through the historic town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania



**Below:** General Butler's car passes the gate at Camp Pontanezen near Brest, France, during World War I





# DOUBLE WINNERS

## OF THE MEDAL OF HONOR

Brave deeds saw these men awarded America's highest military accolade not once but twice

WORDS: SCOTT REEVES

**A**fter John Kelly died in 1957, there were no longer any surviving members of an exclusive club: double winners of the Medal of Honor. Over the decades, 19 men have joined the double-winners club—partly due to membership criteria changing over time. Some men won at least one of their medals due to gallantry in peacetime—the Medal

of Honor is now only awarded for valor in battle. Several proved their bravery during a single event but were given multiple Medals of Honor since the Army and Navy (and now Air Force) can award their own versions. You have already discovered the incredible stories of Thomas Custer, Daniel Daly and Smedley Butler, and now you will meet the other 16 men who were twice commended and awarded America's highest military honor.



# AMERICAN CIVIL WAR



## FRANK D. BALDWIN

FIRST ACTION DATE: JULY 20, 1864

SECOND ACTION DATE: NOVEMBER 8, 1874

ALLEGIANCE: U.S. ARMY

Though a career soldier, Baldwin earned his first Medal of Honor after serving only two years in uniform. Captain Baldwin helped his company to repel a Confederate attack at the Battle of Peach Tree Creek then leapt from his position to lead a counter-charge at enemy lines and the capture of two officers. After this success, Baldwin elected to remain with the Army when the Civil War ended, and he served in the Indian Wars campaigns against Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse. During this conflict Baldwin led a surprise attack on the camp of Cheyenne chief Grey Beard, rescuing two young sisters who had been kidnapped by a different war band. For this attack upon an enemy in a strong defensive position Baldwin earned his second Medal of Honor. He stayed in uniform until 1906, also serving in the Spanish-American War before ending his career as a brigadier general.



## JOHN COOPER

FIRST ACTION DATE: AUGUST 5, 1864

SECOND ACTION DATE: APRIL 26, 1865

ALLEGIANCE: U.S. NAVY

Dublin-born Cooper was already a veteran of the Mexican-American War when he chose to return to service as a 36-year-old during the Civil War. The experienced sailor was a coxswain on the U.S.S. Brooklyn, and he used all his skills during the Battle of Mobile Bay when the Brooklyn was severely damaged. Cooper steered it beyond the reach of Confederate guns and helped to capture the ironclad monitor C.S.S. Tennessee. Seven months later, just after the Civil War ended, Cooper was still in Mobile Bay but now aboard the U.S.S. Stockdale when an ammunition warehouse exploded on the shore. Cooper rushed to help put out the fire that raged through Mobile, and his second Medal of Honor citation stated that he rescued a man from certain death by leaping through a wall of flames and carrying him to safety on his back.

## JOHN LAFFERTY (A.K.A. LAVERTY)

FIRST ACTION DATE: MARCH 25, 1864

SECOND ACTION DATE: SEPTEMBER 14, 1881

ALLEGIANCE: U.S. NAVY

This double winner is something of a mystery. According to paperwork from his first stint in the Navy, John Lafferty was born in 1842 in New York City. During the Civil War, despite being a fireman usually confined to the engine room, he participated in a failed raid to destroy a

Confederate ship—Lafferty helped to carry two torpedoes across swampy ground and stood guard before the raid was foiled. He returned to active service later in life but this time with a different spelling of his surname—John Laverty—and claimed to be born in Ireland in 1845. Nevertheless, historians are sure that the same man won a second Medal of Honor, this time during peacetime. On September 14, 1881, the U.S.S. Alaska was anchored off the Peruvian coast when a stop-valve in the ship's boiler broke, sparking a fire. Laverty and a colleague worked frantically to extinguish the flames, saving the ship and more than 200 men onboard her.

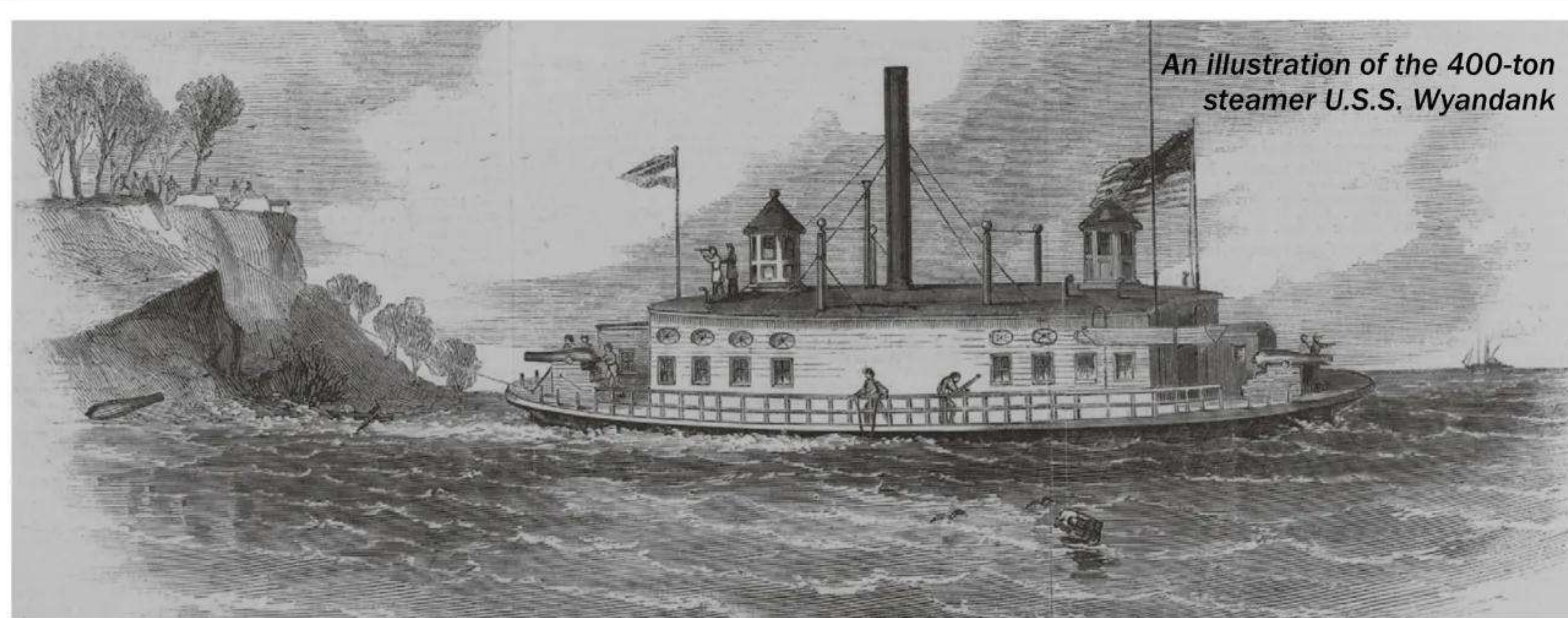
## PATRICK MULLEN

FIRST ACTION DATE: MARCH 17, 1865

SECOND ACTION DATE: MAY 1, 1865

ALLEGIANCE: U.S. NAVY

Near the end of the Civil War, Mullen served as a boatswain's mate aboard the U.S.S. Wyandank, a floating store and barracks tasked with blockading Confederate waterways. On St Patrick's Day 1864—apt for an Irish-born sailor—Mullen boarded a cutter but soon came under attack from a large Confederate force. He took charge of the boat's only howitzer, lying down to keep his head low but still firing accurate shots and killing several enemy soldiers. Less than two months later Mullen was aboard the U.S.S. Don when he helped to rescue the crew of a sinking boat,



An illustration of the 400-ton steamer U.S.S. Wyandank

but one officer in the water was tired and sank beneath the surface. Mullen jumped from his vessel and pulled the officer to safety, earning a second Medal of Honor for his selfless bravery.

Even though Mullen's two Medal-winning actions were only six weeks apart, the Confederates had already surrendered by the second, so only one Medal was a wartime award.



## INDIAN CAMPAIGNS

### WILLIAM WILSON

FIRST ACTION DATE: MARCH 28, 1872

SECOND ACTION DATE: SEPTEMBER 29, 1872

ALLEGIANCE: U.S. ARMY

Wilson joined the U.S. Army just too late to see action in the Civil War, so his military service saw him up against the troublesome Comanches—and he won the Medal of Honor twice in a year thanks to his ruthless attitude towards the enemy. The first came when Sergeant Wilson led a 12-man detachment to pursue a Comanche war band that had stolen cattle from a farm. After riding all night, Wilson pinned down the raiders against the Colorado River and bested them in a shootout without any injuries to his own men. Six months later, when his commanding officer was injured at the Battle of the North Fork of the Red River, Wilson took charge of his unit and attacked a Comanche village. He was awarded his second Medal of Honor for “distinguished conduct in action”, although the Comanches claimed that their wounded were brutally massacred after the battle.



### HENRY HOGAN

FIRST ACTION DATE: OCTOBER 21, 1876

SECOND ACTION DATE: SEPTEMBER 30, 1877

ALLEGIANCE: U.S. ARMY

Hogan's company of the 5th Infantry Regiment was kept busy during the Black Hills War against the Lakota Sioux and Northern Cheyenne. According to his first Medal of Honor citation, Hogan repeatedly distinguished himself in action between October 21, 1876 (the Battle of Cedar Creek) and January 8, 1877 (the Battle of Wolf Mountain). Although the exact nature of Hogan's gallantry isn't recorded in the citation, during this period the 5th Infantry pursued Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse's war bands, seeking revenge for the Battle of Little Bighorn. The reason for Hogan's second Medal is clearer. In September 1877, at the Battle of Bear Paw, Hogan's company led a charge against the Nez Perce tribe—a brave attack for which the company commander, Henry Romeyn, was later awarded the Medal of Honor. But after Romeyn was severely wounded, Hogan pulled his officer to safety, earning his own Medal for rescuing a Medal winner.

## INTERIM

### ROBERT SWEENEY

FIRST ACTION DATE: OCTOBER 26, 1881

SECOND ACTION DATE: DECEMBER 20, 1883

ALLEGIANCE: U.S. NAVY

Ordinary Seaman Sweeney proved his bravery twice in the space of 26 months by rescuing crewmates at risk of drowning. On the first occasion, he witnessed a man fall from a rope ladder attached to the lower boom of their ship, the U.S.S. Kearsarge. Though the ship was at anchor, the seaman in the water couldn't swim

and soon disappeared beneath the surface. Sweeney jumped in after him and kept the man's head above the surface while they trod water and awaited further help, but that aid was slow in coming and Sweeney was twice pulled under by his panicking crewmate. Two years after his rescue, Sweeney and another sailor entered the water to help a boy who fell from a gangplank laid between Sweeney's new vessel, the U.S.S. Yantic, and a training ship, the U.S.S. Jamestown. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for both rescues, making him the only African-American to win it twice.

### ALBERT WEISBOGEL

FIRST ACTION DATE: JANUARY 11, 1874

SECOND ACTION DATE: APRIL 27, 1876

ALLEGIANCE: U.S. NAVY

Petty officer Weisbogel was awarded the Medal of Honor twice for rescuing crewmates at sea—though since his bravery was displayed in peacetime with no enemy present, Weisbogel wouldn't qualify for the Medal of Honor if he did the same today. On January 11, 1874, while serving on the U.S.S. Benicia, Weisbogel

leapt into the sea to save a U.S. Marine who had jumped overboard in an apparent suicide attempt. Just over two years later, while onboard the U.S.S. Plymouth, Weisbogel again followed a crewmate into the water and kept him safe until they were rescued. In both actions Weisbogel's captain recommended he receive the Medal of Honor. Weisbogel also rescued a third drowning sailor between his Medal of Honor actions—this time while serving on board the U.S.S. Juanita. The U.S. Navy's top lifesaver survived his own term of service and died in 1919 at the age of 74.





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**“THE SEAMAN COULDN’T SWIM  
AND SOON DISAPPEARED  
BENEATH THE SURFACE.  
SWEENEY JUMPED IN AFTER  
HIM AND KEPT THE MAN’S  
HEAD ABOVE THE SURFACE  
WHILE THEY AWAITED HELP”**

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**Robert Sweeney rescued two men  
from the water, earning him two  
medals**

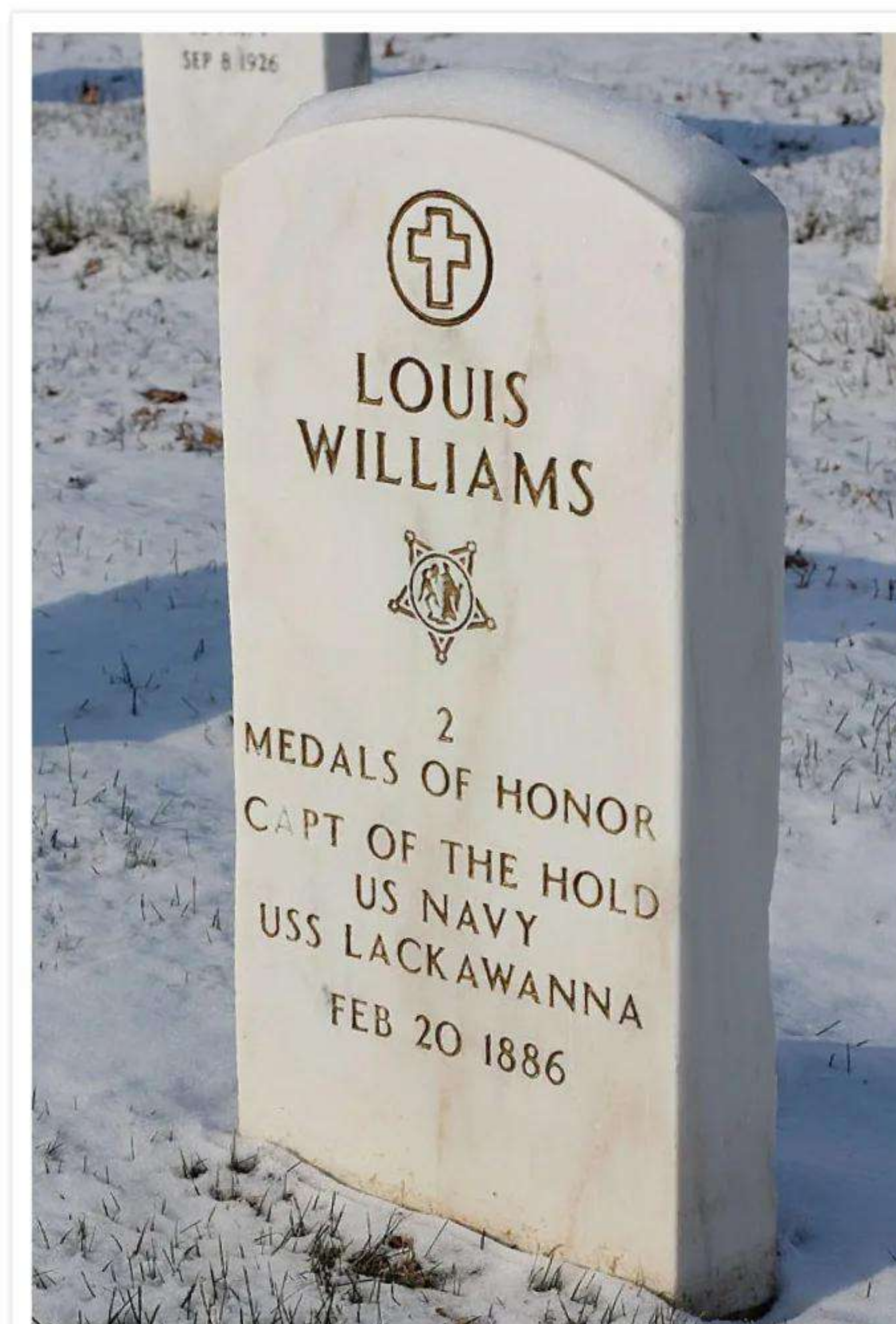
## LOUIS WILLIAMS

FIRST ACTION DATE: MARCH 16, 1883

SECOND ACTION DATE: JUNE 13, 1884

ALLEGIANCE: U.S. NAVY

Williams was born Ludwig Andreas Olsen in Norway in 1845 but adopted the more Americanized name of Louis Williams when he joined the U.S. Navy in California as a 25 year old. He was a talented sailor, rising to the non-commissioned rank of captain of the hold, one that gave him responsibility for the ship’s cargo. Despite working in the depths of the ship, Williams was on deck on the days he won his Medals of Honor, both for rescuing drowning crewmates. The first time, he jumped into the waters off Honolulu, Hawaii, to save a man who’d fallen from the U.S.S. Lackawanna. A little over a year later he repeated the feat off the coast of Peru—this time in a two-man rescue with Isaac Fasseur, who was also awarded the Medal of Honor. Williams died around the age of 40 and is buried in the Cypress Hills National Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York, alongside 23 other Medal of Honor recipients.



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**“BOILER EXPLOSIONS THREATENED THE SHIPS HE WAS ON, BUT  
KING REMAINED AT HIS POST TO QUELL THE RESULTING FIRES  
AND ENSURE THAT THE FLAMES DIDN’T SPREAD”**

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**John King showed remarkable bravery in the engine room**

## JOHN KING

FIRST ACTION DATE: MAY 29, 1901

SECOND ACTION DATE:  
SEPTEMBER 13, 1909

ALLEGIANCE: U.S. NAVY

King was forced into a life at sea—he ran away from home after learning he was wanted by the police in his native Ireland. After serving on civilian ships and landing in America, he joined the U.S. Navy and fought in the Spanish-American and Philippine-American wars. It was during peacetime that he earned two Medals of Honor, however—both for his actions in the engine room. On each occasion boiler explosions threatened the ships he was on, but King remained at his post to quell the resulting fires and ensure that the flames didn’t spread. In 1960, 22 years after King’s death, he received the additional honor of having a U.S. Navy destroyer named after him, and a statue of King was later erected in his birth town of Ballinrobe. He was presumably also forgiven for whatever fracas caused him to run away to sea.



## WORLD WAR I

**LOUIS CUKELA****FIRST ACTION DATE: JULY 18, 1918****SECOND ACTION DATE: N/A (RECEIVED BOTH ARMY AND NAVY AWARD FOR SAME DEED)****ALLEGIANCE: U.S. MARINES**

Born in 1888 in modern-day Croatia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Cukela ended up fighting against his homeland in the First World War after settling in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1913. He first served a term with the U.S. Army before being honorably discharged, but he returned to uniform by enlisting with the Marines in January 1917 and joined the 5th Marines as they battled the German advance in early 1918. By July, during the Battle of Soissons, Gunnery Sergeant Cukela was advancing through the Forêt de Retz when his company stumbled across a German entrenchment. Cukela crawled alone towards a gun pit and bayoneted its crew. Next, he used the enemy's own grenades to target the other gun pits, single-handedly demolishing the German position. Cukela captured four prisoners and two undamaged machine guns, and in return for his bravery, both the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy awarded him the Medal of Honor.

**MATEJ KOCAK****FIRST ACTION DATE: JULY 18, 1918****SECOND ACTION DATE: N/A (RECEIVED BOTH ARMY AND NAVY AWARD FOR SAME DEED)****ALLEGIANCE: U.S. MARINES**

The parallels between Kocak and that of his fellow double medallist Louis Cukela are striking. Kocak was also born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire—in Kocak's case, Slovakia. He emigrated to the U.S. and enlisted in his new country's armed forces before returning across the Atlantic with the 5th Marines when the U.S. entered World War I. During the Battle of Soissons, when the Marines were required to clear woodland ahead of an Allied advance, Kocak spotted a German machine gun nest blocking their onward movement. Kocak replicated Cukela's single-handed attack, driving the Germans back at the point of his bayonet. But unlike Cukela, Kocak did not survive the war. He was killed in action on October 4, 1918, near Thiaucourt, and his double Medal of Honor citations—one from the U.S. Army, one from the U.S. Navy—were announced posthumously, in the early months of 1919.

**CHARLES F. HOFFMAN****FIRST ACTION DATE: JUNE 6, 1918****SECOND ACTION DATE: N/A (RECEIVED BOTH ARMY AND NAVY AWARD FOR SAME DEED)****ALLEGIANCE: U.S. MARINES**

On June 6, 1918, U.S. Marines charged up Hill 142 outside Chateau-Thierry during the Battle of Belleau Wood, an attempt to stall the German spring offensive. Unfortunately, their scouts missed a dug-in regiment of German infantry surrounded by machine gun nests and artillery. After reaching his objective, Hoffman saw a heavily armed group of Germans approach and realized they were the vanguard of a counterattack. Hoffman rushed the attackers by himself, bayoneting its two leaders and forcing the company of ten to retreat, enabling his men to secure their positions before the Germans arrived in greater numbers. Hoffman was wounded during his charge and his unit rushed him to a dressing station. He eventually ended up at the Naval Hospital in New York, where he received word of his extraordinary decorations. For this single action, Hoffman won two Medals of Honor—one awarded by the U.S. Army and one awarded by the U.S. Navy.







## JOHN J. KELLY

FIRST ACTION DATE: OCTOBER 3, 1918  
SECOND ACTION DATE: N/A (RECEIVED BOTH ARMY AND NAVY AWARD FOR SAME DEED)

ALLEGIANCE: U.S. MARINES

Private Kelly joined the Marine Corps to serve his country during World War I, and his bravery—or what some might describe as brashness—saw him decorated on several occasions. He won the Silver Star five times for gallantry in action, including the capture of a machine gun near Thiaucourt. His two Medals of Honor came courtesy of a single action at the Battle of Blanc Mont Ridge, northeast of Riems, when 78th Company advanced on the enemy. Kelly ran ahead of his line, putting 100 yards between him and his comrades, and headed straight for a machine gun nest. He killed the gunner with a grenade before rushing in with a pistol, shooting another crew member. The eight survivors were either incapacitated or surrendered, leaving Kelly the proud new owner of a machine gun nest and a cohort of prisoners—and subsequently Medals of Honor from the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy.

## JOHN H. PRUITT

FIRST ACTION DATE: OCTOBER 3, 1918  
SECOND ACTION DATE: N/A (RECEIVED BOTH ARMY AND NAVY AWARD FOR SAME DEED)

ALLEGIANCE: U.S. MARINES

Around the time that John Kelly rushed away from his line to capture a machine gun nest at the Battle of Blanc Mont Ridge, another soldier in his company did the same thing. Corporal Pruitt single-handedly took on a machine gun nest, wresting control of the defensive position by killing two of the gun operators. He wasn't finished yet. A short time later, Pruitt captured a dugout being used by Germans to shelter from the American attack. Pruitt prevented the enemy inside from escaping, ensuring that 40 soldiers were taken prisoner and removed from the battlefield. At this point, however, Pruitt's luck ran out. He found a shooting hole and sniped at the enemy until an artillery shell exploded on his position, killing him. After the war, General John Pershing named Pruitt as one of his 100 soldiers who had performed extraordinary acts of heroism.



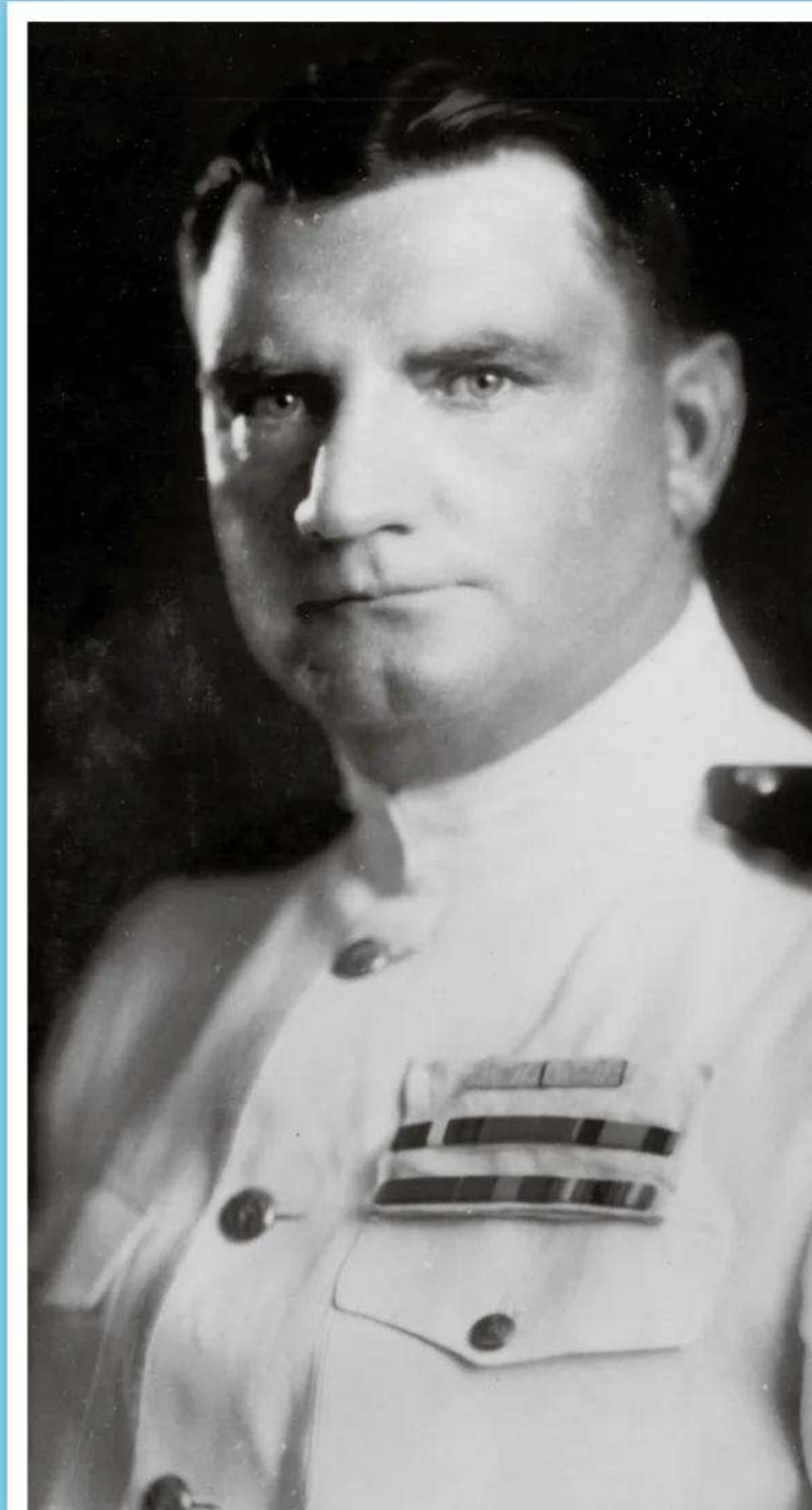
# BOXER REBELLION AND MEXICO CAMPAIGN

## JOHN MCCLOY

FIRST ACTION DATE: JUNE 20–22, 1900  
SECOND ACTION DATE: APRIL 22, 1914

ALLEGIANCE: U.S. NAVY

Career sailor McCloy was two years into his service when the U.S.S. Newark was sent to China to help evacuate foreign nationals during the Boxer Rebellion. During more than a week of dangerous activity McCloy's actions caught the eye of his superior officer, and he was recommended for the Medal of Honor. Nearly 14 years later, American troops had become embroiled in the Mexican Revolution and McCloy's vessel was ordered to support the occupation of Veracruz. McCloy was leading an operation to unload supplies at a pier when his unit came under sniper fire from the nearby Mexican Naval Academy. McCloy ordered his men to return fire so the Mexican snipers exposed their positions. Despite taking a bullet to the leg he remained at his post for 48 hours, after which he was rewarded with a second Medal of Honor for distinguished conduct in battle and extraordinary heroism.





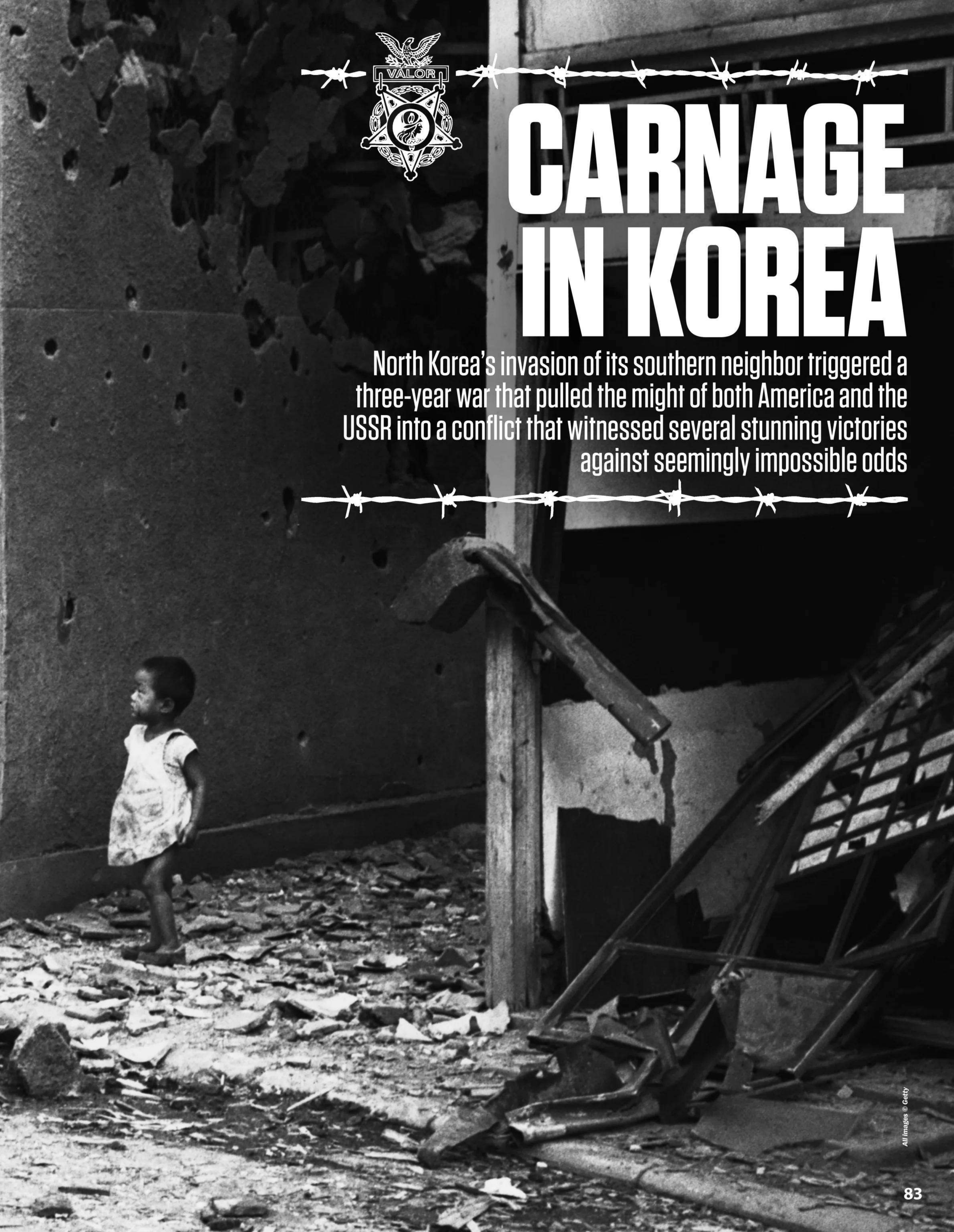






# CARNAGE IN KOREA

North Korea's invasion of its southern neighbor triggered a three-year war that pulled the might of both America and the USSR into a conflict that witnessed several stunning victories against seemingly impossible odds







# RODOLFO HERNÁNDEZ

On a rainy, windswept slope in Korea this seriously wounded corporal refused to abandon his position, confronting an onrushing enemy with a one-man bayonet charge

WORDS: MICHAEL E. HASKEW

**I**t was another miserable night on a hillside in Korea. Rain was pelting down on the men of the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team entrenched about 15 miles south of the village of Wontong-ni.

Corporal Rodolfo P. “Rudy” Hernández and other men of Company G, 2nd Battalion, hunkered low in their foxholes, waiting. At approximately 2.00 a.m. the shrill whine of North Korean bugles pierced the uneasy calm as the enemy marshalled its strength for an all-out assault on the American positions along the barren slope of Hill 420. The precious high ground was an otherwise innocuous promontory in the rugged terrain of northern Korea, but in the predawn darkness of May 31, 1951, it became a killing field, the focal point of a life-and-death struggle.

Ten months after the communist Korean People’s Army had surged across the 38th parallel on June 25, 1950, invading South Korea in an attempt to unify the peninsula by force, United Nations troops had fought the North Koreans and later their allies in the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army to a bloody stalemate. Combat ebbed and flowed, and American forces bore the brunt of the fighting alongside the army of the Republic of Korea. By the spring of 1951, the most recent communist offensive had been blunted and subsequently pushed back almost to its starting line by the determined UN forces.

As overtures of peace talks began to circulate, the commanders of the UN counteroffensive that had successfully reversed the enemy’s fortunes were ordered to essentially suspend major offensive operations, consolidate their positions and conduct only small-scale maneuvers to maintain security, gather intelligence on North Korean troop movements and generally harass the enemy.

For Rodolfo Hernández and others like him, however, the order meant to dig in, while the fighting, dying and muddling through a miserable existence continued just the same.

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**“FEARLESSLY ENGAGING THE  
FOE, HE KILLED 6 OF THE ENEMY  
BEFORE FALLING UNCONSCIOUS  
FROM GRENADE, BAYONET,  
AND BULLET WOUNDS BUT HIS  
ACTION MOMENTARILY HALTED  
THE ENEMY ADVANCE...”**

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Medal of Honor citation

Hernández, a native of Colton, California, was one of eight children born into a family of farm workers. In 1948, at the age of 17, he obtained permission from his parents and enlisted in the U.S. Army, volunteered for parachute training and was assigned to the 187th Airborne Infantry Regiment. A few months later his unit was shipped to Germany as a component of the post-World War II occupation forces. Then, two months after the eruption of the Korean War, the regiment was reorganized, reinforced and designated the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team.

Among the first American and UN units to reach the Korean peninsula following the outbreak of hostilities, the 187th Airborne RCT deployed to the combat zone from Japan in late August 1950. Nicknamed the “Rakkasans” due to the literal translation of the English ‘airborne’ to Japanese being ‘falling with umbrellas’, the unit completed a parachute insertion near the towns of Sukchon and Sunchon, fought Chinese troops at Wonju and then executed a follow-up airdrop in the Munsan-ni Valley on March 23, 1951, which was only the second airborne operation of the Korean War. During its combat service the 187th Airborne RCT earned a Presidential Unit Citation.

Hernández remembered his 11th parachute jump vividly as the troopers exited their transports from an altitude of just 600 feet. “We jumped into the enemy... Before the jump I felt like John Wayne. By the time my chute



*Years after receiving the Medal of Honor for heroism in Korea, Rodolfo Hernández wears the decoration with pride at the 60th anniversary commemorations of the war*

★  
“SHRAPNEL TORE MY  
HELMET FROM MY HEAD  
AND [INJURED] A LARGE  
PART OF MY SKULL AND  
A PART OF MY BRAIN.  
I WAS PARALYZED,  
UNCONSCIOUS... IN A  
COMA FOR A MONTH”  
★

Corporal Rodolfo Hernández



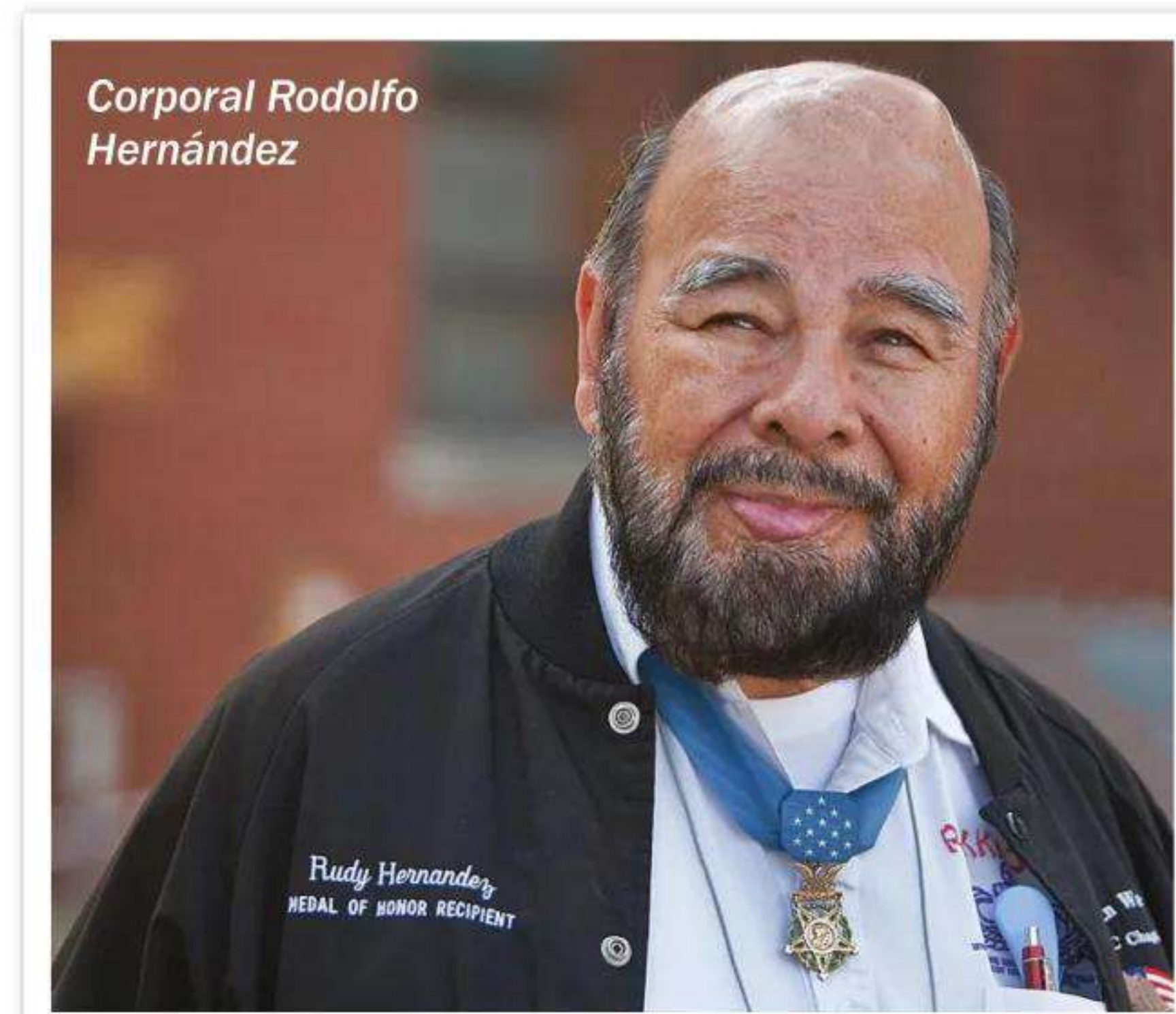
## THE KOREAN WAR

After receiving a compensation payment, recovering Corporal Rodolfo Hernández sits with Colonel William Woolger at Camp Cooke Hospital



★  
“THESE ARE WONDERFUL CITATIONS. THEY SHOW JUST EXACTLY WHAT THE FIBER OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE IS MADE OF. THEY SHOW EXACTLY HOW THE YOUNG MEN FEEL TOWARD THEIR GOVERNMENT”  
★

President Harry S. Truman at Medal of Honor ceremony



Corporal Rodolfo Hernández

opened, I was already on the ground. The first round that went over my head was artillery. Afterward, I felt this big,” he related, holding two fingers about an inch apart. “I knew they meant business.”

Although it was not their first time in combat, the encounter at Hill 420 was one of the most intense the troopers of the 187th experienced during their entire tour of duty. As the high-pitched communist bugle calls subsided, an intense artillery and mortar barrage erupted. Shells of varied caliber screamed down on the American line, blasting craters and spewing shrapnel in every direction. Machine guns chattered and rifle fire crackled as a wave of North Korean troops

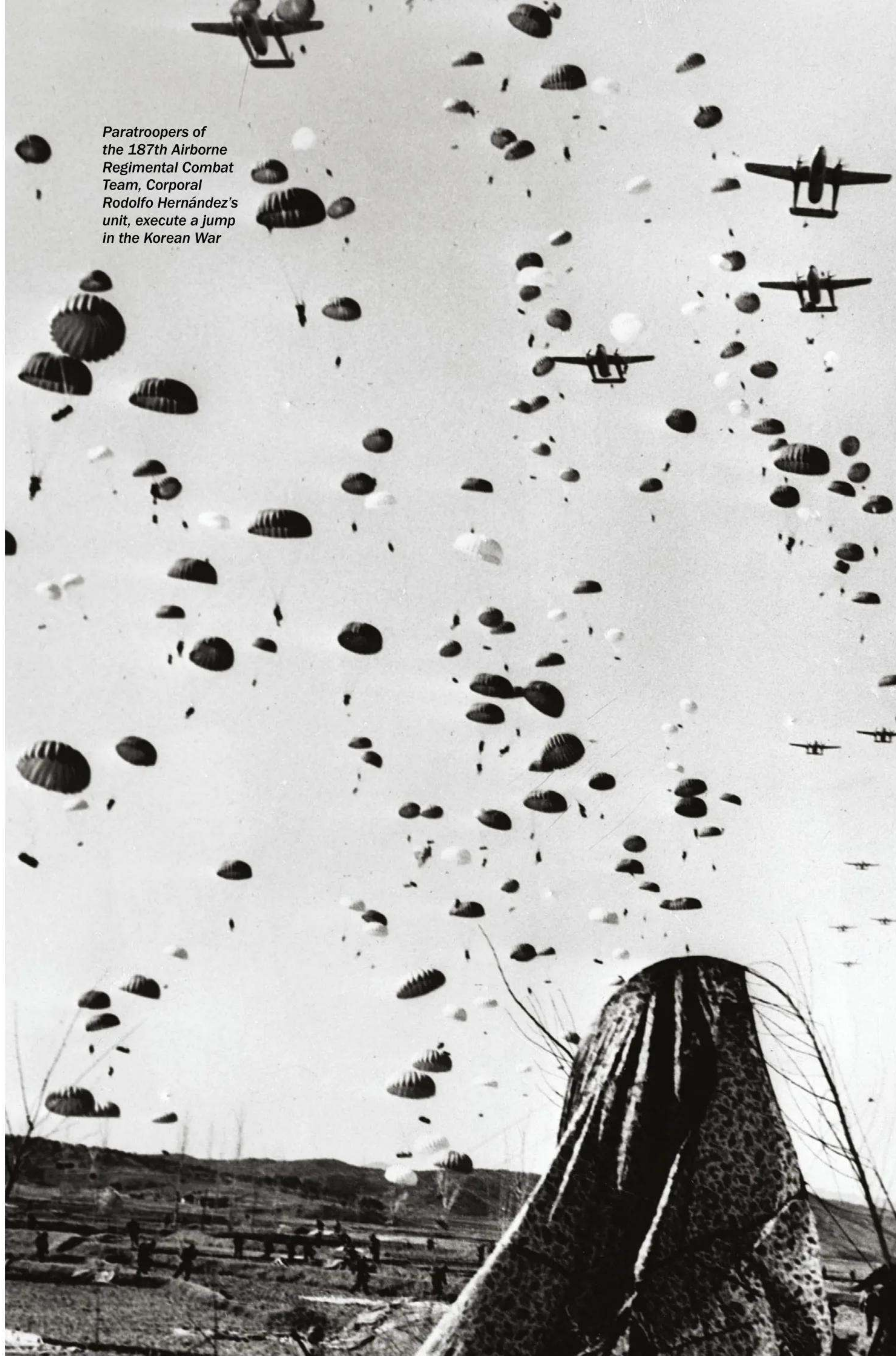
surged forward in an attempt to drive the defenders from the high ground.

Hernández and the rest of Company G fired steadily at the shadowy mass of enemy troops streaming up the slope, peppering their line with automatic weapons fire and stopping long enough to shower the American positions with hand grenades. Early in the fighting both Hernández and his foxhole mate were wounded. The enemy onslaught appeared unstoppable, and as ammunition supplies dwindled the order was passed for the 187th to pull back.

“I was struck all over my body by grenade fragments,” remembered Hernández. “I was hurt bad and getting dizzy.” Still, he kept shooting at the approaching North Koreans



Paratroopers of the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team, Corporal Rodolfo Hernández's unit, execute a jump in the Korean War



until his rifle jammed when a cartridge cooked off in the chamber. Within seconds he was stunned as a shell fragment sliced through his helmet, inflicting a grievous wound that tore away a portion of his skull and some brain matter.

Hernández hurled hand grenades at the onrushing enemy until his supply was

**Right:** Corporal Rodolfo Hernández, received the Medal of Honor and proudly wore the shoulder patch of the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team



exhausted. "My buddy was firing, and I was firing, and my platoon leader said 'Withdraw!' I didn't want to withdraw. I couldn't fire more because of the ruptured cartridge. I had six grenades, and I threw all six. At that time I was wounded... I thought no doctor was going to repair me. I might as well go out all the way. I put my bayonet on my rifle and said 'Here I come!'"

Hernández emerged from cover, rushing forward and bayoneting the first enemy soldier he encountered. "Every time I took a step, blood rolled

down my face. It was hard to see. I killed one with the bayonet, and the second one got me here," he said, pointing to his chin. "But he didn't go very far. He took some of my teeth out. I killed six of them before falling unconscious."

The one-man bayonet charge rocked the attackers, who hesitated just long enough for Company G and the rest of the 187th Airborne RCT to reorganize and counterattack, regaining the summit of Hill 420. The Americans held on grimly until the North Korean onslaught melted away before daylight.

As soon as they were able, medical personnel moved in. Corpsman Keith Oates was the first to reach Hernández, lying surrounded by the bodies of the six enemy soldiers he had bayoneted to death. Oates did what he could, dressing wounds from enemy bayonets in the soldier's back and lower lip and sending Hernández down the hill on a litter. Bloody and spattered with mud, his large head wound appearing lethal, Hernández was declared dead as he lay at the aid station. Attendants placed him in a body bag and started to carry him away. Just then, one of them noticed a slight movement of his fingers. Miraculously, he was alive. After evacuation, he remained unconscious for a month. During his recovery the hero was transferred to several hospitals. Doctors repaired his shattered lower jaw and replaced the missing piece of skull with a plastic plate. His wounds were devastating.


"I had to learn how to swallow, eat, feed myself, walk, and speak," Hernández recalled. "Months passed before I was able to speak a single word. It took 12 years for me to recover from the massive injuries that I sustained. I underwent multiple surgeries for five years and spent the next eight years working to regain control of my body. I still do not have complete use of my right arm and hand, but I learned to write and do most things with my left hand."

Early in his recovery Hernández was informed that he would receive the Medal of Honor for his heroism at Hill 420. On April 12, 1952, he was able to stand during the ceremonies in the White House garden as President Harry S. Truman presented the medal to Hernández and two other recipients, Army 1st Lieutenant Lloyd Burke and Technical Sergeant Harold E. Wilson, U.S. Marine Corps.

Hernández's citation read in part, "His comrades were forced to retire due to lack of ammunition but Corporal. Hernández, although wounded in an exchange of grenades, continued to deliver deadly fire into the ranks of the onrushing assailants until a ruptured cartridge rendered his rifle inoperative. Immediately leaving his position, Corporal Hernández rushed the enemy armed only with rifle and bayonet."

After the war, Rodolfo Hernández returned to civilian life, attending college and working for the Veterans Administration in the Los Angeles area as a counsellor to other wounded veterans. He retired to North Carolina, regularly receiving honors and recognition for his valor in Korea. During a Veterans Day parade 56 years after the fateful engagement at Hill 420 he reunited with medic Keith Oates, who had helped save his life. Hernández died in 2013 at the age of 82.





A U.S. Army artillery crew fires a 105mm howitzer at North Korean communist positions during a battle in the Republic of Korea

★  
“NO GOOD SOLDIER WANTS TO GO TO WAR, BUT THAT’S WHAT HE’S TRAINED FOR. WHEN I WAS IN THE ARMY, AND FELLOW SOLDIERS WERE ENGAGED IN WAR, I WANTED TO BE THERE”  
★

Colonel Ola L. Mize





# OLA L. MIZE

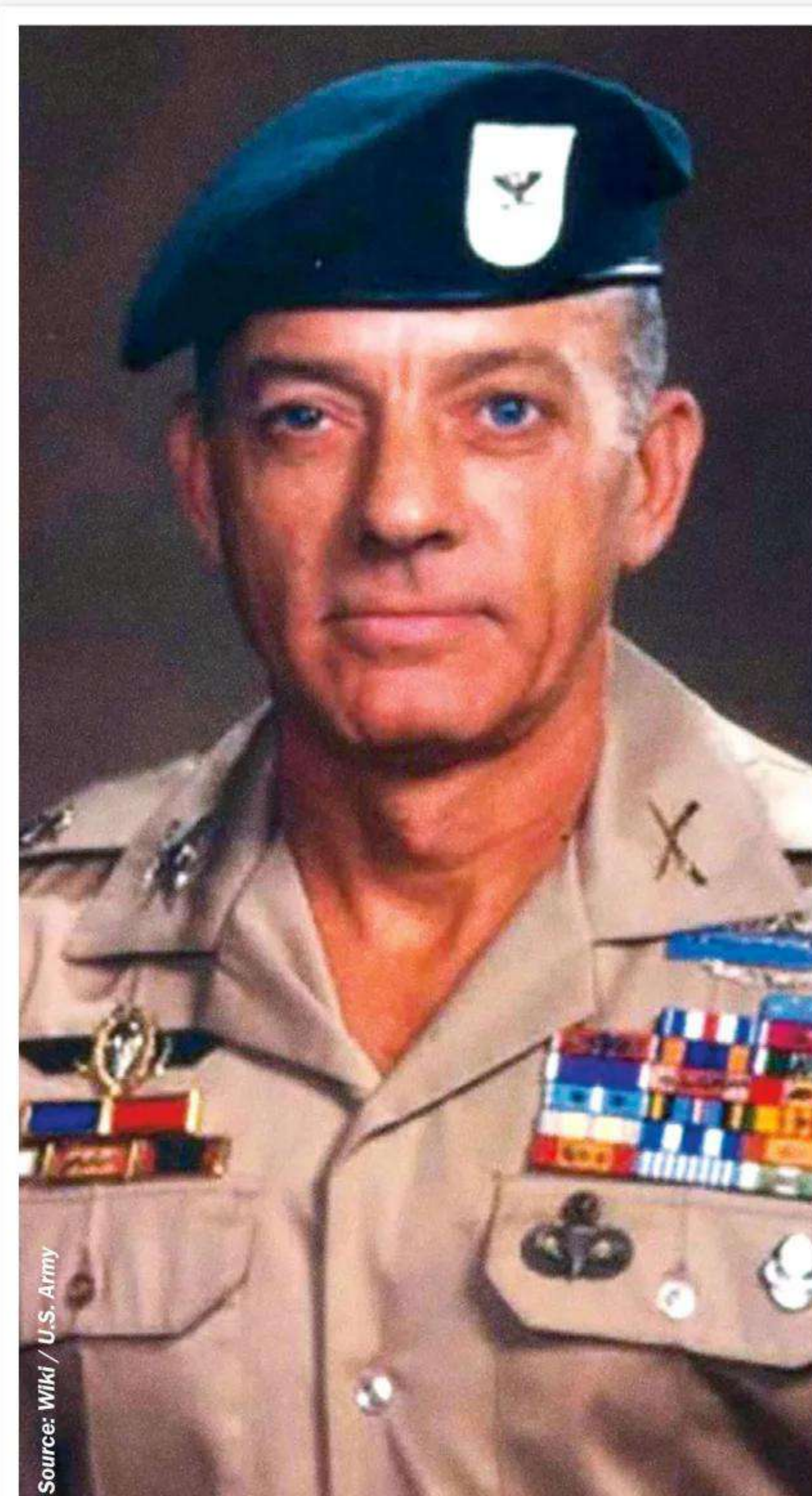
Leading the determined defense of a hilltop position in South Korea on June 10, 1953, Sergeant Mize displayed tremendous heroism, rescuing wounded comrades and killing dozens of enemy soldiers

WORDS: MICHAEL E. HASKEW

**W**hen the smoke cleared and the rattle of automatic weapons fire finally faded, 21-year-old Sergeant Ola Lee Mize and a handful of American infantrymen were left standing. Hours of brutal combat against the 22nd and 221st Regiments of the Chinese 74th Division were over, and scores of enemy bodies lay sprawled across the hillside known as Outpost Harry. Repeated enemy onslaughts had come to nothing, but the defenders had also paid a heavy price. Only 12 of the original 56 Americans manning the position had survived. Near the end of the Korean War, United Nations forces were contesting a Chinese offensive in mid-June 1953. American troops defending a 13,000-yard stretch of the front line near Surang-ni, South Korea, would eventually lose 174 killed and 824 wounded.

No ground was more bitterly contested than Outpost Harry, which was located in the 'Iron Triangle' about 60 miles northeast of the South Korean capital of Seoul and on the most direct route to the city.

When Mize made his way to a command post the morning after the fighting of June 10–11 had ended, officers asked who he was. The dirt and grime of combat obscured his face. He was wounded. His uniform was tattered, and some observers remembered that the vest he wore was actually smoking. When the young soldier responded, "Sergeant Mize," an officer chirped, "You're not Mize. He's dead."



Sergeant Ola L. Mize earned the Medal of Honor at Outpost Harry during the Korean War on June 10, 1953

Mize had survived an incredible ordeal and became an unlikely hero, ultimately receiving the Medal of Honor. The son of an Alabama sharecropper, he was practically blind in one eye due to a childhood accident and weighed only 120 pounds. Nevertheless, he would not accept the army's initial rejection. He gained weight and practiced with spoons to pass the required vision test, deftly manipulating the paddle that supposedly covered one eye and then the other to pull off the illusion that he was switching eyes.

At the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 Mize was concluding service with the 82nd Airborne Division. Rather than attending college he decided to re-enlist and requested a combat opportunity. It came on that hot June night, when Mize was a sergeant with Company K, 15th Infantry Regiment, Third Division.

Outpost Harry was located closer to the enemy, just 320 yards from Chinese lines, than the main United Nations perimeter, 425 yards away. One of three such outposts (the other two were named Tom and Dick), Harry rose 1,280 feet. Holding the high ground was essential because it shielded a portion of the main United Nations line and the adjacent Kumwha Valley from Chinese observation and artillery fire.

The defense of Outpost Harry rotated with four U.S. infantry companies and one Greek company occupying the position in turn. For more than a week, the hill was under intermittent artillery and mortar barrages, a total of more than 88,000 shells falling on the defenders. On the morning of June 10,





Captain Martin A. Markley of the 15th Regiment relayed orders to his command that an attack was imminent. He later commented, “All total there was a reinforced PVA [People’s Volunteer Army] regiment of approximately 3,600 enemy trying to kill us.” The Chinese attackers outnumbered Company K 30 to 1.

As night fell, Mize knew they were coming. He had seen a steady stream of Chinese trucks behind a distant ridgeline, but requests for artillery and air strikes were denied as he was told the enemy was simply resupplying troops already in place. “Well,” he said. “If that’s what they’re doing they must have the whole Chinese Army in front of me because they have been moving trucks up at night with their lights on for the last five days.”

After receiving a call from a weapons squad leader, Mize moved up to a forward position to take a closer look. “Something was wrong near his position, and he couldn’t figure out what it was,” Mize recalled.

“I climbed up and looked out over our trenchline, and there were bushes all over the place, within ten yards of our trenches. I said, ‘Where the hell did all those bushes come

★

“M/SGT. MIZE’S CONDUCT  
AND UNFLINCHING COURAGE  
REFLECT LASTING GLORY UPON  
HIMSELF AND UPHOLD THE  
NOBLE TRADITIONS OF THE  
MILITARY SERVICE”

★

Medal of Honor citation

from?’ About that time a few of them moved. I just automatically started spraying the hell out of those bushes.  
“There were bodies falling all over the place, and about that time they kicked off the artillery, and I thought the end of the world had come.” Mize had killed an estimated ten enemy infiltrators, but Company K’s problems were only just beginning.

An all-out, battalion-sized infantry assault followed the artillery barrage. “For the next two hours,” Mize remembered, “all I was doing was shooting Chinese as fast as they came over that trench line and filling the trench up with them.” He came across one of his men armed with a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle), swinging the weapon like a club at six Chinese soldiers. Mize shot all six of them.  
When he heard that a soldier manning a listening post had been wounded, Mize set out with a corpsman to rescue the man and returned safely. He proceeded to organize a defensive system that disrupted the Chinese attack. Despite the fact that all Company K officers were dead or wounded, Mize and a few other soldiers maintained steady fire and hurled grenades at the enemy. They moved from bunker to bunker to give the impression that the Chinese were confronting a much larger defending force.  
The concussion of enemy mortar rounds and exploding hand grenades knocked Mize off his feet three times, but he regained his composure and relentlessly fought the enemy, which regrouped and charged Outpost Harry



Fighting with the End Infantry Division, northeast of the Chongchon River, SFC Major L. Cleveland points out the North Korean position to his machine gun crew



repeatedly. When a Chinese soldier stepped behind an American and prepared to fire, Mize shot him dead with a single bullet and then continued to encourage the men around him while distributing precious ammunition.

The Chinese wave overran several American positions. Mize remembered seeing a comrade's throat cut and later described his response as going "battle crazy". As enemy soldiers leaped into an American machine gun position, Mize hurried to the scene and killed ten of them, putting the rest to flight. When he returned to his original position his men were amazed that he was still alive.

A story of the sergeant's combat prowess later circulated, asserting that he had dispatched the last of the Chinese soldiers in the machine gun position with an entrenching tool after emptying the magazine of his M-1 carbine. Accordingly, a bronzed entrenching tool was hung proudly on the wall behind his desk in later years. Hand-to-hand combat was indeed common during those desperate hours.

Mize provided cover for several wounded men who could not immediately be evacuated. He found a radio and directed artillery fire on the

attackers milling around the base of the hill. As the Sun began to rise, he quickly pitched in to organize a counterattack that finally drove the enemy back.

By the time the fighting of June 10–11 had ended, Company K had been reinforced by Companies C and E, 15th Infantry, and a platoon of tanks. Battered but unbroken, Mize's men were soon relieved. For seven more days the Chinese hammered away at Outpost Harry. Their fury spent unsuccessfully, they withdrew after sustaining an estimated 5,250 killed and wounded. United Nations losses amounted to 655 dead and wounded and 44 missing in action.

Sergeant Ola Mize is believed to have single-handedly accounted for 65 of the Chinese killed in defense of Outpost Harry. "I thought I'd bought the farm," he said in a postwar interview. "I just knew I was going to die. I knew it. I accepted it. All I wanted to do was take as many of them with me as I could."

Sergeant Mize completed his tour of duty in Korea and was recommended for the Medal of Honor soon after the bloodshed at Outpost Harry. Initially, he refused his country's highest honor for bravery in combat, stating that those

who really deserved it were the men who died defending the desolate hill.

Promoted to master sergeant, Mize did accept the Medal of Honor from President Dwight D. Eisenhower on September 7, 1954. "I was scared to death, a country boy from northeast Alabama meeting the President of the United States," he recalled. "He stood there and talked to me and put the medal around my neck. He saw I was nervous and said, 'I would be too if I was as young as you are looking at an old crow like me.'"

Mize remained in the U.S. Army, and along with 27 other Special Forces soldiers splashed ashore on a Normandy beach as an extra in the motion picture *The Longest Day*. He completed the Special Forces Officers Course and subsequently three tours of duty in Vietnam. He led several Special Forces advanced training programmes and developed the Combat Divers Qualification Course. Leading Detachment B-36 of 3rd Mobile Strike Force Command in 1969, he was awarded the Silver Star for valor. Mize retired with the rank of colonel in 1981. He died aged 82 of cancer on March 5, 2014.





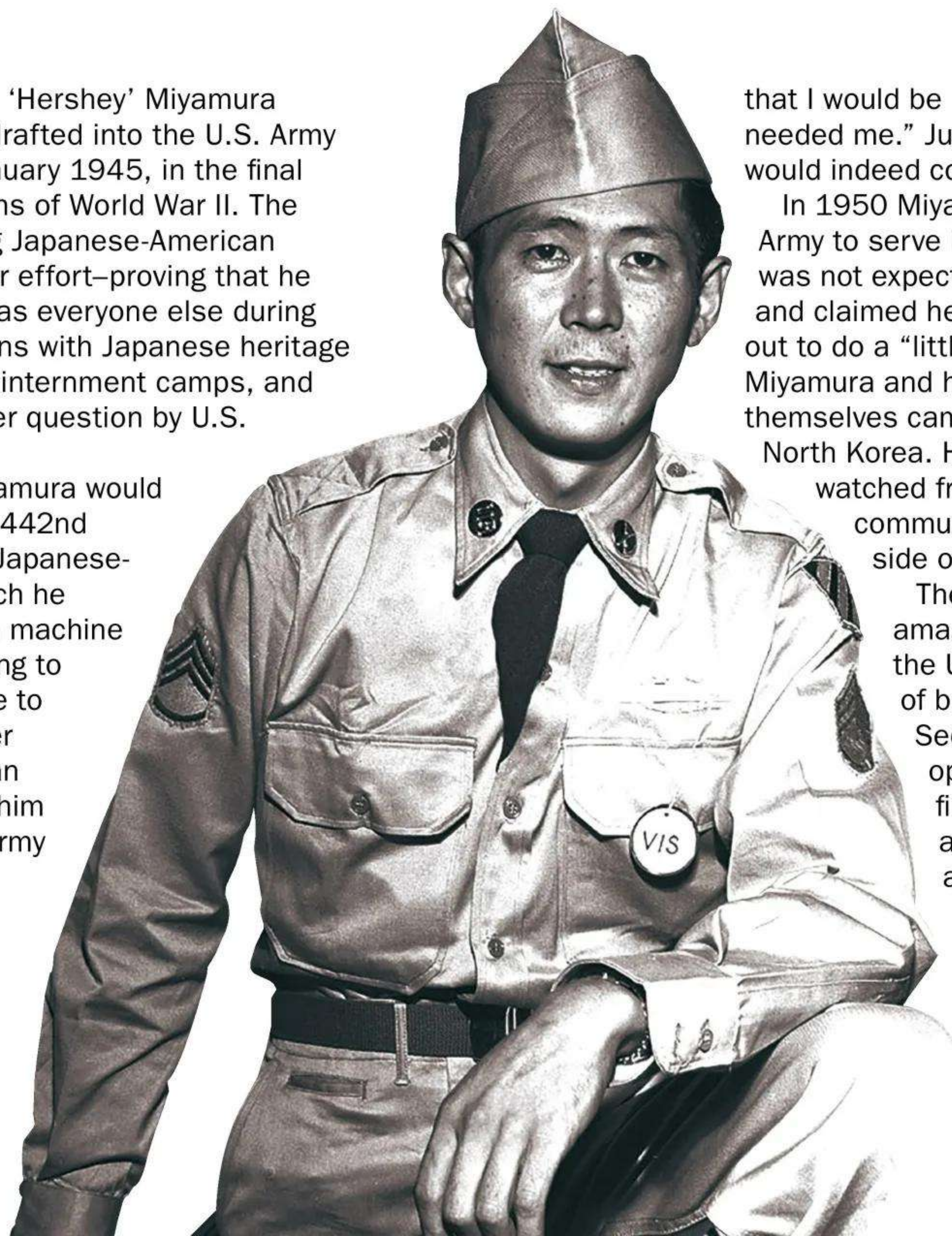
# HIROSHI 'HERSHEY' MIYAMURA

On April 24, 1951, when Chinese communist soldiers attacked U.S. Company H in the hills near the Imjin River, this corporal held back the tide and protected his men

WORDS: JACKSON VAN UDEN

**H**iroshi 'Hershey' Miyamura was drafted into the U.S. Army in January 1945, in the final months of World War II. The young Japanese-American eagerly joined the war effort—proving that he was just as patriotic as everyone else during a time when Americans with Japanese heritage were being placed in internment camps, and their loyalty was under question by U.S. government policy.

During the war Miyamura would briefly serve with the 442nd Infantry Regiment, a Japanese-American unit, in which he received training as a machine gunner before returning to the United States due to ill health. He was later discharged after Japan surrendered, leaving him to enlist in the U.S. Army Reserve. Miyamura, when asked why he joined the Reserve, replied, "I thought that with my training



that I would be ready to serve again if my country needed me." Just a few years later his country would indeed come calling again.

In 1950 Miyamura was summoned by the U.S. Army to serve in the Korean War. However, he was not expecting to participate in any fighting and claimed he'd thought they were heading out to do a "little police work". By April 1951 Miyamura and his company, Company H, found themselves camped on the eastern side of North Korea. He and the rest of his company watched from their position as the Chinese communist forces swelled on the north side of the Yellow River.

The Chinese forces had been amassed to begin a fresh assault on the United Nations lines with the aim of breaking through and recapturing Seoul. Vastly outnumbering their opponents, the Chinese Army finished its preparations and advanced. In response to this assault Miyamura, as the machine

*A member of the U.S. Army Reserve, Hiroshi Miyamura was called up in 1950 to serve in the Korean War*

Images: Alamy, Getty, Wiki / PD / Gov



Miyamura with his Medal of Honor after giving a lecture at one of his last public appearances before his death in 2022

★  
“CONSPICUOUS GALLANTRY  
AND INTREPIDITY ABOVE  
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DUTY WHILE SERVING...  
[HIS] INDOMITABLE  
HEROISM AND CONSUMMATE  
DEVOTION TO DUTY REFLECT  
THE UTMOST GLORY ON  
HIMSELF AND UPHOLD THE  
ILLUSTRIOUS TRADITIONS OF  
THE MILITARY SERVICE”  
★

Medal of Honor citation





gun squadron leader, was ordered by his platoon sergeant to take 15 men into the hills just south of Imjin River to help defend the regiment and attempt to hold the line against the Chinese attackers.

Up in the hills near the river on April 24, 1951, Miyamura and his men set themselves up to defend their line, their regiment and their fellow countrymen. Miyamura readied himself with his machine gun as they waited for the Chinese advance. Once the Chinese attacked he took control of his squad and directed them to shoot at the Chinese in short bursts while he also fired on them with his machine gun and threw grenades. As the assault grew more intense and it began to look as if he and his squad might be overrun, Miyamura fixed his bayonet to his rifle and, according to his Medal of Honor citation, “unhesitatingly jumped from his shelter” and charged at the enemy. He single-handedly broke up the attack by killing approximately ten Chinese soldiers in close-quarters combat, his quick intervention helping save the men who’d survived the initial assault. He then returned to his squad’s position to help administer first aid and direct them to evacuate the wounded.

With the injured troops safely evacuated, Miyamura and what remained of his squad defended against another savage assault from the advancing Chinese. The attacks continued to grow in their intensity and began to slowly chip away at his squad’s defenses. Reading the situation, Miyamura ordered his men to withdraw to a second machine gun position while he covered them with what was left of his machine gun’s ammunition before fighting his way through another Chinese attack with his bayonet to meet his squad at the second position.

The Chinese soldiers continued to advance and Miyamura, ever concerned with the safety of his men, ordered them to retreat as he stayed behind to cover their withdrawal. He continued to fight despite receiving several



**Above:** Miyamura pictured at a Japanese American Citizens League Banquet held in his honor shortly after his return home  
**Top:** President Dwight D. Eisenhower presents him with the Medal of Honor, October 1953

wounds, using all of his machine gun ammunition, grenades and his trusty bayonet to hold off the enemy advance. During this stand-off Miyamura killed more than 50 Chinese soldiers.

As he fought off the enemy with the last of his supplies, Miyamura recalled, “Our mortars started

dropping phosphorous bombs on our position. That woke me up to the thought: ‘I’ve got to get out of here.’” And get out of there he did, making a break down the hill through the trenches to reach his company. With thousands of Chinese soldiers surrounding Miyamura, this made the journey towards safety incredibly treacherous. Making his way down the hill, he was forced to engage in hand-to-hand combat with a Chinese soldier. During their fight he stabbed the man with his bayonet. Miyamura must have thought he was close to navigating a safe passage down the hill, but as he fell back while withdrawing his bayonet from his opponent, the severely wounded Chinese soldier threw a grenade at him. The ever-alert Miyamura managed to kick it away before it exploded.

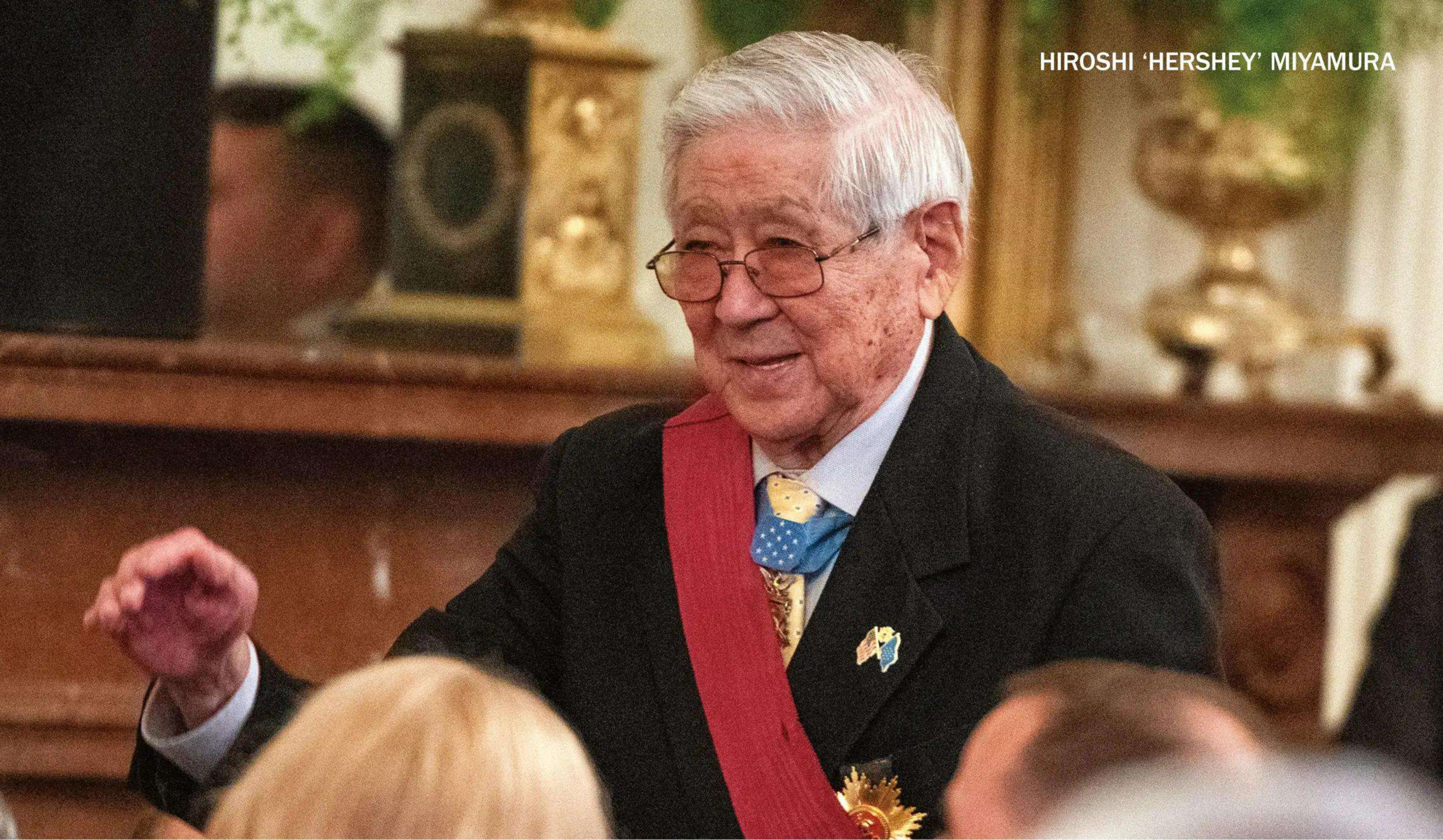
During the engagement Miyamura had so far managed to evade the clutches of death several times, and the grenade was yet another narrow escape for him. When it exploded shrapnel tore into his legs, leaving him badly wounded. Despite the pain of his injuries, Miyamura continued his bloody slog to safety. At the camp towards which he was heading his comrades had set up a defensive perimeter to slow the Chinese advance. However, this also had the effect of slowing down Miyamura as he ran into the barbed wire, suffering more injuries. He was forced to crawl under the barbed wire while trying to gain the attention of his men, but the pain from all of his wounds caused him to pass out.

Four days later the U.S. Army 3rd Division recaptured the hill where Miyamura had made his stand and saw the dead Chinese soldiers left in the wake of his attempts to defend his men. His Medal of Honor citation was drafted days after his heroic actions had been reported, with the assumption that he had died during the fighting. The citation honors Miyamura’s “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving” and his “indomitable heroism



*Freedom Village, from where Miyamura was returned to the U.S., being prepared for the arrival of Chinese prisoners*





**Top:** During his captivity at the hands of the Chinese, Miyamura's Medal of Honor had to be kept top secret by the U.S. authorities to protect him from retribution

**Above:** Miyamura greets fellow Medal of Honor recipient Sergeant 1st Class Leroy Petry in 2011

**Right:** Miyamura died on November 29, 2022, at the age of 97 and was buried with full military honors at Sunset Memorial Park in Gallup, New Mexico

and consummate devotion to duty reflect the utmost glory on himself and uphold the illustrious traditions of the military service".

Unknown to Miyamura's men, he had survived after passing out within touching distance of safety. When he awoke, he heard marching. He remained still. Just when he thought he might be able to resume his escape, a voice behind him barked at him to get up and told him he was his prisoner. He was now a captive of the Chinese, and for



the next month he was forced to walk 300 miles through North Korea to a prisoner of war camp. During this march he received little to no medical treatment and no rations, and had to witness many of his fellow prisoners dying from exhaustion or starvation. Miyamura would remain imprisoned for the next 27 months, the threat of hunger and dysentery a daily menace that he was forced to face.

Presumed missing in action, his Medal of Honor was awarded secretly in December 1951, eight months after his capture. Four months later, the Chinese included Miyamura's name on a list of prisoners of war. From this point it became critical that his award was kept secret to keep him safe, as explained by Brigadier General Ralph Osborne: "If the Reds knew what he had done to a good number of their soldiers just before he was taken prisoner, they might have taken revenge on this young man." This earned Miyamura the title of 'America's Secret Hero'.

On August 20, 1953, Miyamura was released by the Chinese at the Freedom Village on the border between North and South Korea. Two months later he was presented with his Medal of Honor by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

During his military career Miyamura became a hero, saving hundreds of lives. He also proved, like he said when he enlisted, that he was just as American as every other citizen of his country. He was an inspiration to millions across the world, but he was the greatest inspiration to his granddaughter, who now serves as a lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force.

"He's the reason why I'm serving in the military today. He has lived his whole life with honor, and that is a great legacy for me."



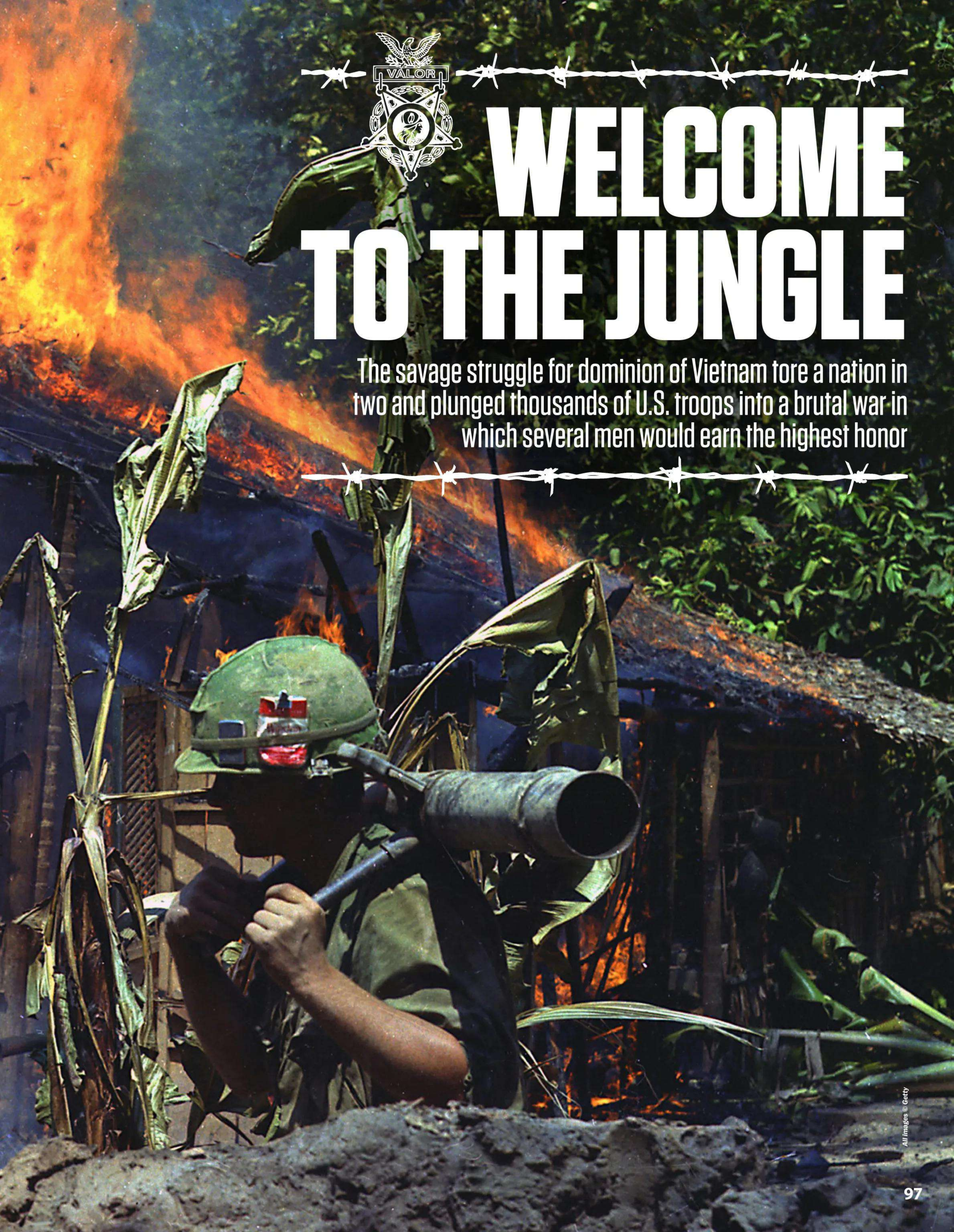






# WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

The savage struggle for dominion of Vietnam tore a nation in two and plunged thousands of U.S. troops into a brutal war in which several men would earn the highest honor







# LESLIE SABO, JR.

Barely a year into his military career, Sergeant Sabo would become a legend thanks to one of the most awe-inspiring acts of courage of the Vietnam War

WORDS: DOM RESEIGH-LINCOLN

**B**orn on February 22, 1948, in the Austrian town of Kufstein, Leslie Halasz Sabo, Jr., was the third son of two upper-class members of a once-powerful Hungarian family. The Sabos had lost their fortune in the aftermath of World War II, but they had also lost something far more precious—one of their sons, who died during the bombing raids of the war at the age of one. The end of the war also saw the arrival of the Red Army. Fearing the installation of a totalitarian infrastructure, his mother and father decided to pull up their roots and flee the country with Leslie and his older brother George to seek a new life elsewhere.

The Sabos arrived in the United States in 1950 when Leslie was just two years old. The family initially moved to the center of the U.S. steel industry, Youngstown, Ohio, but soon relocated to Ellwood City, Pennsylvania. Despite hailing from war-torn Europe, Sabo, Sr., expected nothing more than strict discipline and patriotism from his family for their new adopted home. The U.S. had welcomed them in the aftermath of the war and enabled them to start afresh—it was the least they could do to pay back such a gesture.

His sons took their father's sentiment to heart, but these were two young boys growing into men in late 1950s and early 1960s U.S., so Sabo and his brother were just as excitable and carefree as any other youth of their time. Sabo often enjoyed bowling or shooting pool and his brother recalled him being a decent kid all round.

That clean-cut image saw Sabo through his early education and he soon graduated from Lincoln High School in 1966. He then went on to study at Youngstown University, but after a year of college he realized it wasn't for him. Sabo took a job in the industry of his hometown—steel. He would continue working at a local steel mill until he was drafted into the army two years later.

Sabo joined the United States Army in April 1969 and attended Basic Combat Training at Fort Benning, Georgia, before moving onto Advanced Individual Training (AIT) in September. A soldier in training he may have been, but that didn't stop his life from moving forward in other ways. Before joining the forces Sabo had proposed to the love of his life, Rose Buccelli, but the two had planned their wedding for the same month as his new phase of training. Thankfully,

*Below: Due to administrative errors, the petition to reward Sabo's efforts with the Medal of Honor was lost in the 1970s. More than 42 years later, his widow, Rose, was finally presented with his posthumous award*



the army granted him a brief window of leave and the two were joined in matrimony.

With AIT now wrapped up, he was assigned to Bravo Company, Third Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, 101st Division. Trained as a rifleman, Sabo was deployed to Vietnam in January 1970 and thrust into the heart of a conflict that had been raging since 1955. But Sabo wasn't afraid—he wrote to his wife regularly, describing how much he enjoyed the discipline of the army and how his platoon had often come into contact with troops from the main force the U.S. was fighting against, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA).

On May 10, 1970, Sabo's platoon had been temporarily attached to the Fourth Infantry Division and tasked with performing interdiction tactics (the act of disrupting an enemy's normal activities) in Cambodia along the Ho Chi Minh Trail (the main logistical route used by the NVA during the war). The plan was to use ground troops such as the Fourth that could be supported with heavy air support when contact with the enemy was made. However, things did not go as expected.

While two platoons' worth of American GIs made their way along the trail an ambush was sprung. 150 NVA soldiers had been tracking the movement of the troops and begun to gather surreptitiously in the cover of the surrounding jungle. Then they pounced. Soldiers fell straight away and the American troops were in disarray. As the reality of the ambush dawned on Sabo, he charged the enemy. Shouting at his men to do the same, he headed down the line and launched an offensive against the NVA attackers at the other end of the column of troops. Some of the NVA soldiers retreated, giving the Americans a brief moment of respite.

Now out of ammunition, Sabo sprinted across the open field and began reloading his rifle next to an injured American soldier. Suddenly a



*Sabo had barely been in the U.S. Army for 12 months before he faced the events of the Mother's Day massacre*

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★

**“SABO DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF  
BY CONSPICUOUS ACTS OF  
GALLANTRY AND INTREPIDITY  
ABOVE AND BEYOND THE CALL  
OF DUTY AT THE COST OF HIS  
OWN LIFE”**

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★

**Official Medal of Honor citation**

**AIRBORNE**



## “WITHOUT HESITATION, SPECIALIST FOUR SABO CHARGED AN ENEMY POSITION, KILLING SEVERAL ENEMY SOLDIERS”

### Official Medal of Honor citation

grenade bounced into view, thrown by an NVA soldier. Without even thinking, Sabo threw the grenade away and dove on his incapacitated fellow trooper. His selfless act kept the soldier safe, but Sabo took the worst of the blast.

However, this was no time to stop and count wounds; the Mother’s Day Ambush (as it would come to be known) was still unfolding and his men were dying. A nearby enemy trench was laying waste to his men, the NVA soldiers’ position providing them enough protection from any returning fire. Sabo threw a grenade into the trench, killing two of the attackers inside.

With his fellow soldiers running low on ammunition, Sabo continued to put his own life on the line, running through the chaos of the ambush, collecting ammunition from fallen GIs and redistributing it back to his brothers in arms. He would even pop himself out of cover and draw enemy fire so his fellow soldiers could retreat or find better cover. In many of those instances he was hit, but the young man still fought on.

As night began to fall, American helicopters, under heavy fire from the NVA soldiers, were unable to ferry the two dozen wounded left on the battlefield away to safety. Realizing that the wounded were doomed unless someone acted, Sabo once again put himself in harm’s way, providing covering fire and killing NVA soldiers in the process.

What was left of Bravo Company broke through the Vietnamese lines and relieved the remaining troops, but the helicopters then came under pressure from a bunker close by. Determined to help his injured comrades get to safety, Sabo advanced on the bunker, firing shot after shot until his ammunition was exhausted.

Taking even more fire, Sabo dropped to his knees. But he refused to give in and dragged himself on until he was close enough to make one last gesture of defiance. He drew out a grenade, pulled the pin and threw it with every last drop of energy inside him. The grenade landed true and destroyed the bunker, silencing it for good. But Sabo was too close when it exploded, and the blast took his life as well. His sacrifice gave the remainder of his platoon the time it needed to evacuate, saving countless lives. Sabo was aged just 22.

Yet, as grand and selfless as his acts were, Sabo’s efforts on that dank Cambodian field were lost to the chaos of the Vietnam War. He was posthumously promoted to the rank of sergeant, but the nature of his death remained a mystery to his family (the U.S. Army officially stated he had been killed by a sniper while guarding an ammunition cache). Although his company commander requested he be awarded the Medal of Honor, the documents were lost and Sabo’s sacrifice forgotten.

That was until 1999, when another Vietnam War veteran and columnist discovered the official report from the Mother’s Day Ambush. He published his discovery in a divisional newspaper and wrote to his local congresswoman imploring her to help Sabo’s story be told and properly recognized. It took another seven years before the Department of Defense agreed to grant him the highly deserved Medal of Honor, and another six for it to be finally awarded and presented by Barack Obama to his widow Rose. Despite more than four decades of obscurity, Leslie Sabo’s awe-inspiring sacrifice could finally be recognized in the manner it deserved.



*Despite the losses Sabo and his men endured, the two platoons managed to inflict more casualties on the NVA by the end of the battle*





**01** **Walking into an ambush**  
On May 10, 1970, two platoons are sent to engage the NVA at Se San (a Vietnamese and Cambodian river). While en route, the platoons are ambushed by a force of 150 NVA soldiers who had been lying in wait in the jungle.

**02** **Driving back the NVA**  
The platoons had been marching in a column and, positioned near the front, Sabo finds himself right in the thick of the battle. He and the rest of the platoons hunker down and do their best to stop the NVA from surrounding and butchering them.

**03** **Protecting the wounded**  
With the ambush in full effect, Sabo continues to hold back the NVA. In the heat of battle, Sabo sees an enemy soldier throw a live grenade towards a wounded American. Moving on pure instinct alone, Sabo throws the grenade away and covers his fellow soldier, taking the brunt of blast himself.

**05** **The final sacrifice**  
Already riddled with bullets and badly burned from the grenade blast earlier, Sabo makes his way towards a machine gun emplacement that is in danger of wiping out the American soldiers once and for all. Crawling with every last ounce of energy, he throws in a grenade. The nest is destroyed, but Sabo loses his own life in the process.

**04** **Resupplying the troops**  
As the battle continues to rage, the Americans are starting to run low on ammunition. Sabo begins popping his head out of cover to draw out the NVA—he kills countless foes but takes many hits in the process. This enables him to scour the battlefield for ammunition from fallen soldiers and redistribute it to the remainder of the platoons.



President Barack Obama presents retired U.S. Army Sergeant First Class Melvin Morris with the Medal of Honor for heroism in Vietnam

**"THE PRESENTATION OF OUR NATION'S HIGHEST MILITARY DECORATION—THE MEDAL OF HONOR—IS ALWAYS A SPECIAL OCCASION. BUT TODAY, IT IS TRULY HISTORIC"**

President Barack Obama

Image: Getty







# MELVIN MORRIS

Living up to the Green Beret credo of ‘no man left behind’, this former sergeant risked his life to recover the body of a fallen comrade during an ambush in Vietnam

WORDS: MIKE E. HASKEW

**M**elvin Morris was astonished when he answered the telephone. The 72-year-old decorated combat veteran had retired from the U.S. Army nearly 30 years earlier and was living a quiet life in Cocoa, Florida. The voice on the other end belonged to an army colonel who said that a high-ranking government official wanted to speak to him.

Immediately, Morris thought something dreadful was about to happen. He envisioned government agents at his front door, threatening some dire consequence for a mysterious offence. Although his initial reaction was one of concern, the news he received a short time later was startling.

The telephone rang again, and the familiar voice of the colonel asked Morris to hold on a moment for that high-ranking official. Then, on the other end of the line came the unmistakable voice of President Barack Obama, who informed the army veteran that he would be receiving the Medal of Honor, an upgrade on the nation’s second-highest medal for courage in the face of the enemy, the Distinguished Service Cross. The President made Morris promise to keep the news secret until all arrangements for the ceremony were completed. Thinking the whole conversation might actually have been a hoax, Melvin called the colonel back. “Is this for real?” he asked. “Am I really getting the Medal of Honor?” The colonel confirmed that the call was indeed “for real” and reminded the stunned former soldier to keep it quiet, even from family,

until he was authorized to talk. “I fell to my knees. I was shocked,” Morris remembered.

Melvin Morris had always wanted to be a soldier. As a boy growing up in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, he had seen relatives in uniform and decided at an early age that a military career was for him. He joined the Oklahoma Army National Guard in 1959 and then opted to enter the regular army. When President John F. Kennedy gave a boost to the expansion of the army special forces and endorsed their distinctive headgear, Morris was one of the first to become a ‘Green Beret’, qualifying for the elite force in 1961. He volunteered twice to serve in Vietnam, at the height of the bloody, protracted war.

On the afternoon of September 17, 1969, Staff Sergeant Morris was with a detachment of advisors from Company D, 3rd Battalion, IV Mobile Strike Force, 5th Special Forces Group, assisting civilian irregular defense forces near the South Vietnamese village of Chi Lang. “And that mission was to search and destroy,” he later explained. “In other words, to hunt the enemy. Destroy his equipment and destroy his supply points, his caches. A tough unit, you know that is what we did on a weekly basis. They did not come to us; we came to them. And you know with this training experience I had, you always had a fear factor, but I was not afraid or scared. No. You cannot do your job if you are scared or afraid, but fear is built in all of us that keeps us on guard.”

At first the mission was uneventful, but the prospect of an encounter with the North

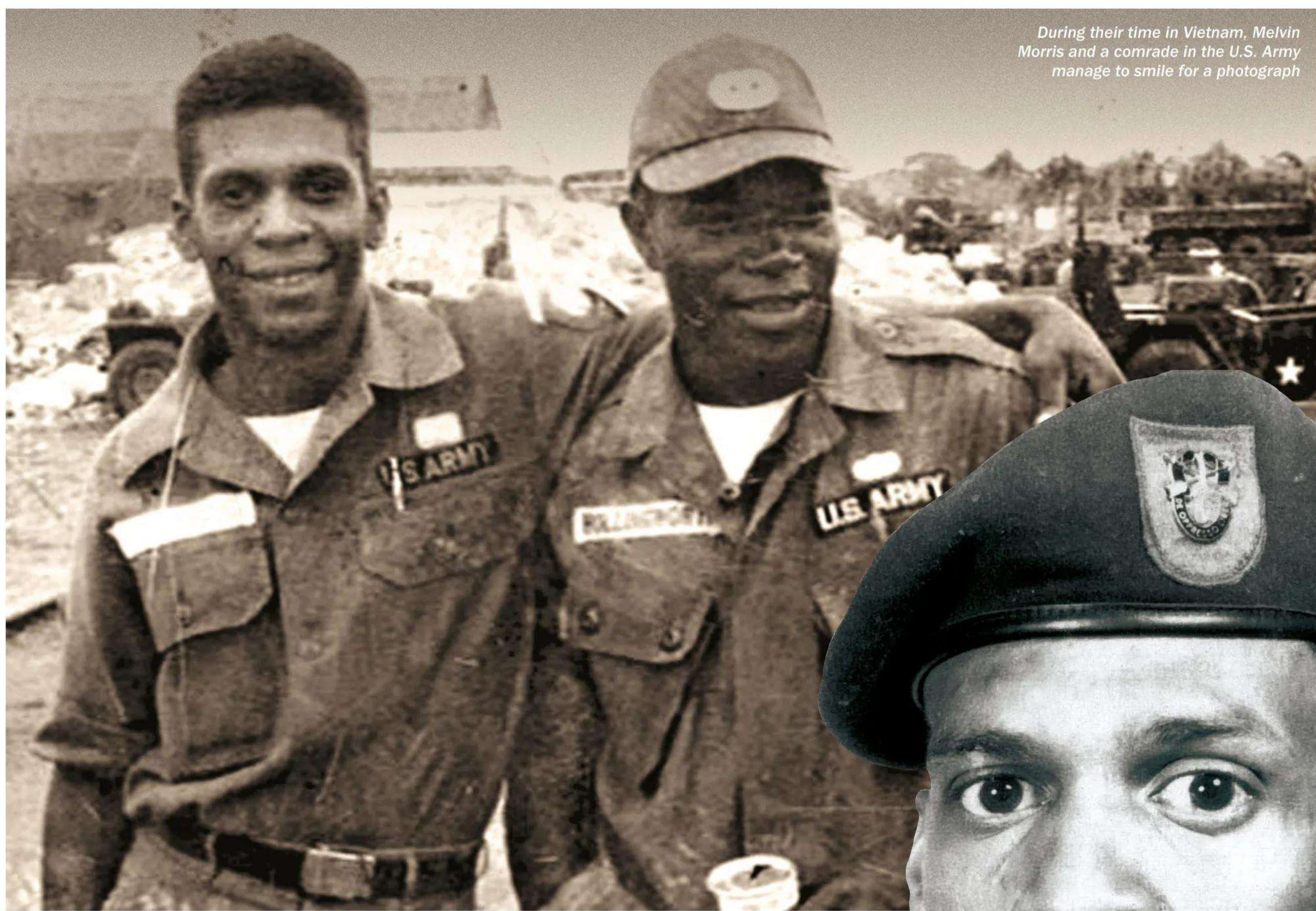
Vietnamese was always a possibility—an enemy ambush could strike like lightning. Alert and ready for action, Morris recalled proceeding warily. “We moved out that day, moving across a rice field,” he later said. “We came to the village. An old lady was singing, and there was no activity in the village.”

The silence was deafening, and Staff Sergeant Morris knew in his gut that an ambush was coming. The force encountered an enemy minefield, and soon the sound of gunfire was heard in the distance. The radio crackled with the unwelcome news that a sergeant leading up ahead with the team had been killed. More gunfire was heard, and two more soldiers were soon wounded.

“There were only five of us advisors; two were wounded and one killed,” he recalled. “I knew I had to go and recover his body. You just don’t leave a soldier behind. So all three of them were down, and that left me and my young assistant, who had just gotten in the country by about maybe two weeks. No experience as far as combat was concerned, but, you know, I ignore that factor because he is in it now and he has got to step up, and so did I. So we moved out and we reached the area where our teams were, and we were taking quite a bit of fire. So...my job was to find the team sergeant’s body and recover it because we have a motto; you leave no brother behind—as special forces we are strict with that.”

Morris asked for volunteers to go into harm’s way and recover the body of the dead soldier. Two other men were willing, and the trio moved





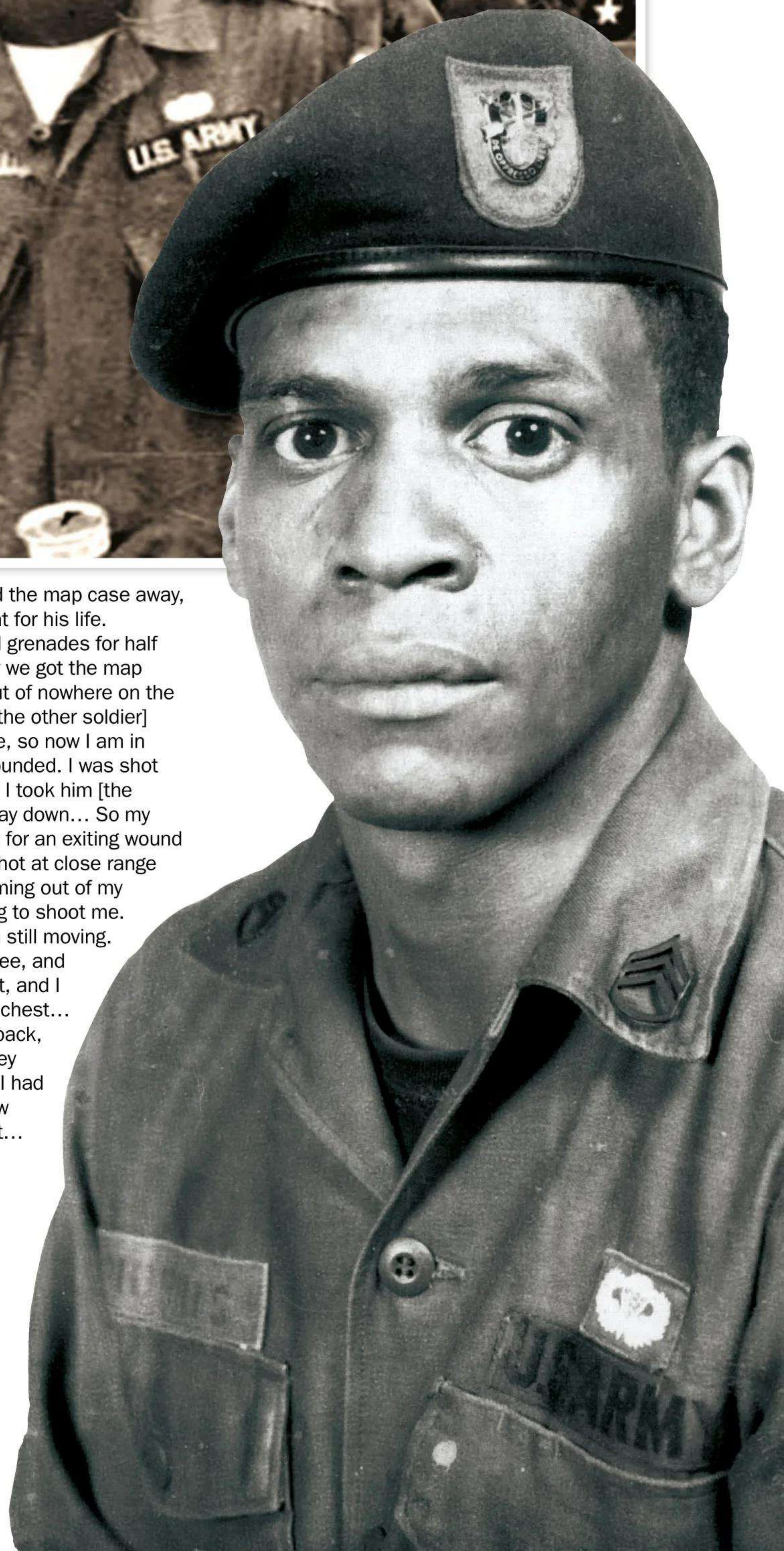
*During their time in Vietnam, Melvin Morris and a comrade in the U.S. Army manage to smile for a photograph*

ahead. However, these two brave volunteers were soon both wounded. After helping the two injured men to safety, Morris turned to J.C. Glynn, a medic who had come along on the mission. "He said, 'Doc, I'm going to get him,'" Glynn remembered. "Nobody goes into war thinking they are going to be a hero."

Grabbing two bags of hand grenades, Morris leaped towards the enemy again. He silenced the nearest bunker with the explosives and continued forward as suppressing fire from his men provided some limited cover. As he approached the spot where his comrade's lifeless body lay, Morris continued tossing grenades into enemy bunkers, destroying three more as he reached the body. He began to carry it back towards his own men, along with a case that contained maps with troop dispositions and other valuable information clearly marked. Had the enemy taken possession of the maps the security of American and South Vietnamese positions in the area would have been compromised, and many more men might have

died. Another soldier carried the map case away, and Morris continued to fight for his life.

"I must have thrown hand grenades for half an hour," Morris said. "After we got the map case, as an enemy came out of nowhere on the right... he shot me. Treper [the other soldier] was gone with the map case, so now I am in there by myself and I am wounded. I was shot right through the chest, and I took him [the enemy soldier] out on the way down... So my first instinct... was to check for an exiting wound in my back because I was shot at close range and I could see bubbles coming out of my chest. Now they're still going to shoot me. They still want me, and I am still moving. So I got up behind a palm tree, and I grabbed my first aid packet, and I patched it to the hole in my chest... I did not have a hole in the back, and I knew I was good... They started firing at me, and so I had one grenade left, and I threw that at one enemy to my left..."




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**"I SAID, 'WHAT YOU'VE GOT TO DO IS ROLL OVER AND GET THEIR WEAPON AND START FIRING!' AND THAT IS WHAT I DID"**

**Sergeant Melvin Morris**

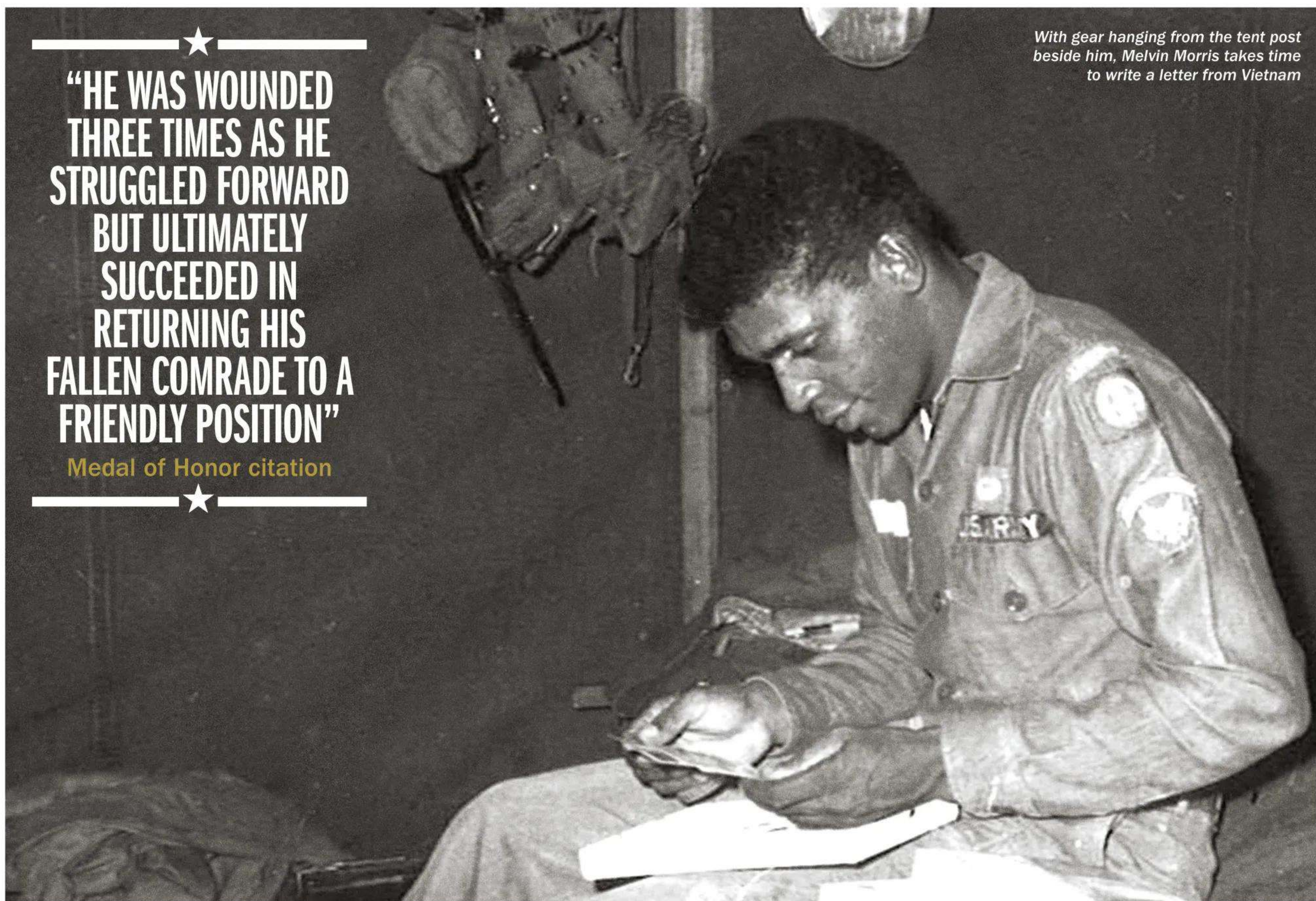
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★  
**“HE WAS WOUNDED  
 THREE TIMES AS HE  
 STRUGGLED FORWARD  
 BUT ULTIMATELY  
 SUCCEEDED IN  
 RETURNING HIS  
 FALLEN COMRADE TO A  
 FRIENDLY POSITION”**

Medal of Honor citation

*With gear hanging from the tent post  
 beside him, Melvin Morris takes time  
 to write a letter from Vietnam*



I had seen him blow up, and during that time I got shot again because I came out from behind a palm tree. I got back behind the palm tree, and they were shooting right into it. So now I am hit in the right arm...”

As he moved closer to his own line, Morris was wounded a third time. A bullet struck his left hand, leaving his ring finger hanging only by shredded flesh. He thought about just pulling it from his hand and throwing it away, but then decided against that desperate measure.

Through it all, he managed to bring the dead sergeant's body along with him.

Seriously wounded, Sergeant Morris was later medevaced (medically evacuated) from the scene of the ambush. He spent weeks recovering in hospitals in Vietnam and Japan and was transferred to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where he was expected to be admitted to Womack

Army Medical Center. Morris, however, would have none of it. “I refused to go,” he said. “I went back to work. I took a little convalescence with my family, and I went back to work!” He volunteered for a second tour in Vietnam, even though he had not fully recovered from his wounds, because he hadn't “finished [the] job”.

About the time he received orders to return to Vietnam, Morris discovered that he was to receive the Distinguished Service Cross for his valor on September 17, 1969. The ceremony took place in April 1970. He went on to receive a Bronze Star along with two Purple Hearts and the coveted Combat Infantryman Badge, among many other awards for his service.

Morris retired at Fort Hood, Texas, in May 1985, with the rank of sergeant first class after 26 years of service in the U.S. Army and National Guard.

Still bearing the scars and lingering physical effects of his wounds, Morris got on with his life with his wife Mary, who had raised their three children while Morris was deployed in Vietnam and elsewhere. She had prayed every day for his safe return and remained his wife for more than half a century. Morris's experience in Vietnam remained vivid in his memory.

33 years after his heroic and desperate afternoon under intense fire in Vietnam, the U.S. Congress authorized the Department of Defense to reassess approximately 6,500 incidents of performance beyond the call of duty during World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. The impetus for the reevaluation was the possibility

that acts of heroism that were actually deemed worthy of the Medal of Honor might have been withheld from service personnel because of racial or ethnic prejudice, resulting in the award of a lower-grade decoration.

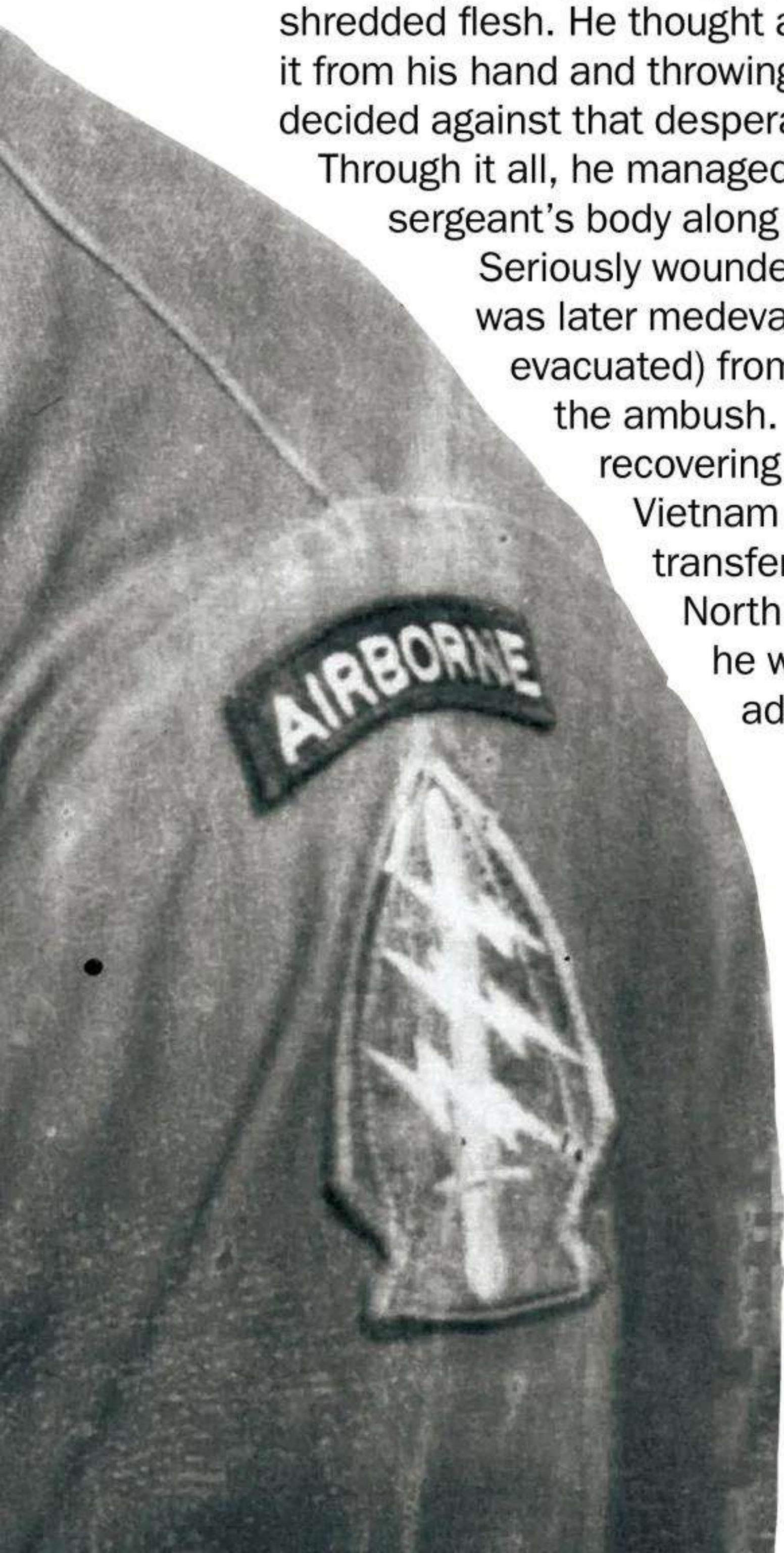
As it transpired, during the 12-year assessment period only 24 awards from the thousands reviewed were deemed worthy of upgrades to the Medal of Honor. Of these, only three heroes were still living. Retired Sergeant First Class Melvin Morris was one of them.

Morris received his life-changing telephone call in 2014. “I want to apologise to you for your not getting the Medal of Honor 44 years ago,” President Obama told the astounded veteran.

Morris received the Medal of Honor along with 23 other living and deceased recipients during a ceremony at the White House on 18 March that year. His citation read in part, “Upon reaching the bunker nearest the fallen team commander Staff Sergeant Morris repulsed the enemy, retrieved his comrade and began the arduous trek back to friendly lines.”

Although grievously wounded, Melvin Morris had seen his duty clearly, risked his life against long odds, accomplished the task at hand and kept the faith with the long line of Green Berets before and after him. Although it took over four decades, his nation finally righted a grave injustice when President Obama fastened the pale blue ribbon of the Medal of Honor around Morris' neck. Now, 81, he continues to serve his nation by speaking at military conventions and passing on his knowledge to school children.

*Left: Melvin Morris  
 served with the  
 Green Berets  
 and volunteered  
 for two tours of  
 Vietnam during the  
 brutal conflict*







# RAUL PEREZ BENAVIDEZ

On May 2, 1968, this master sergeant rescued Special Forces and Montagnard soldiers surrounded by a North Vietnamese Army battalion operating in Cambodia

WORDS: MICHAEL E. HASKEW

**T**he gunfire crackled so loudly it sounded like popcorn, startling Raul “Roy” Benavidez, who heard the frantic calls for help over the radio at the U.S. Special Forces forward operating base in Loc Ninh, South Vietnam, near the border with Cambodia.

“Get us out of here! For God’s sake, get us out!” came the cries for evacuation from a 12-man team of Fifth Special Forces Group Detachment B-56 inserted across the Cambodian frontier. Their mission had been to capture a North Vietnamese truck and drive it back to base as proof that communist forces were using Cambodian territory as a covert means of supply and reinforcement to their troops in South Vietnam. Soon after deployment by helicopter, however, the team was in dire straits, surrounded by a North Vietnamese Army battalion numbering perhaps 1,000 troops.

One rescue attempt had already failed, the helicopters driven away by intense enemy fire. Several members of the team were already dead and others were seriously wounded. The 240th Assault Helicopter Company was mounting another attempt, and Benavidez rushed to join the effort. As one chopper’s mortally wounded 19-year-old door gunner slipped into his arms and died, Benavidez asked, “Who are those people on the ground?”

When the pilot shouted that Benavidez’s friend Sergeant First Class Leroy Wright and his detachment were the ones under fire,



Benavidez yelled, “I’m coming with you!” Three days earlier he had been involved in a similar mission and owed Wright a tremendous debt. As Benavidez and another soldier were descending by rope, the two lines became entangled. The friction threatened to snap the lines. From the hovering helicopter, Wright descended on another rope, freed the tangled lines and probably saved the lives of Benavidez and the other soldier.

Now every second counted, and Benavidez climbed aboard the helicopter with only a medical kit and his Bowie knife. This day, May 2, 1968, would be life-changing, and after surviving a harrowing ordeal that he called “six hours in hell” Benavidez was hailed a hero, eventually receiving a long overdue Congressional Medal of Honor.

Never one to hesitate when it came to confronting danger, Benavidez was no stranger to hardship. This was his second tour in Vietnam. One of the first of 125,000 American soldiers deployed to Southeast Asia in October 1964, he served as an advisor to the South Vietnamese military until he was grievously wounded when he stepped on a mine while on patrol. He was evacuated to the Philippines and then transferred to Brooke Army Hospital at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, where doctors pronounced that he would never walk again.

**Left:** Master Sergeant Roy Benavidez was wounded 37 times while rescuing trapped comrades in Cambodia



SEALs abseiling from a UH-1  
Huey in Vietnam, 1967

★  
“THE REAL HEROES ARE THE ONES WHO  
GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR COUNTRY. I  
DON’T LIKE TO BE CALLED A HERO. I JUST  
DID WHAT I WAS TRAINED TO DO”  
★

Master Sergeant Roy Benavidez





★

**“IF THE STORY OF HIS  
HEROISM WERE A MOVIE  
SCRIPT, YOU WOULD NOT  
BELIEVE IT”**

★

**President Ronald Reagan**

*The U.S. Navy named a transport ship  
USNS Benavidez in recognition of the  
Medal of Honor recipient*

Image: Alamy

Benavidez, however, thought differently. Slipping from his bed night after night, he crawled painfully to a nearby wall, gritted his teeth and steadily worked bone and muscle until he walked out of the hospital in July 1966.

By the time he was wounded, Benavidez was already a veteran and hardened by his experiences on and off the battlefield. Born in the small town of Lindenau in South Texas, he was orphaned at the age of eight along with his younger brother. He dropped out of school at 15 to help support the extended family that had taken them in. After shining shoes in the local bus station, working in a tyre store and labouring as a farmhand, he joined the Texas National Guard in 1952 at the height of the Korean War. Three years later he opted for active duty. Then the promise of additional pay enticed him to volunteer for airborne training, which he completed in 1959. Subsequently, he joined the Special Forces, the Green Berets, becoming a linguist and interrogator trained in light and heavy weapons and cross-trained as a medic. After recovering from his wounds, he was assigned to Central America but volunteered for a second tour in Vietnam.

That terrible day in Cambodia, Benavidez applied his extensive training and an

unwavering will to survive. Attending prayer services at 1.30 p.m., his quiet contemplation was shattered with the distress call. As the Bell UH-1 Iroquois helicopter (a model affectionately nicknamed ‘Huey’) left Loc Ninh, he knew that Wright, Staff Sergeant Lloyd ‘Frenchie’ Mousseau, Specialist 4 Brian O’Connor and their native Montagnard mates were in serious trouble. Minutes later, Benavidez rode the Huey literally into the jaws of death.

The landing zone (LZ) was hot with enemy fire and the Huey could not land. As it hovered ten feet above the ground, Benavidez leapt out and began running toward the surrounded soldiers. As soon as he left the chopper a round from an enemy AK-47 assault rifle slammed into his right leg. He fell in a heap but got up and continued the 75 yards to the cover of brush and trees where his comrades were hanging on grimly. As he rose to his feet, the concussion of a grenade hammered his entire body. Shrapnel ripped into his face and neck. Undeterred, he kept moving forward.

When he finally reached the trapped men, Benavidez distributed water and ammunition, repositioning them to fire effectively. He quickly saw that four men were already dead, among them his friend Wright. The other eight were

wounded, and it was clear that they could not hold on much longer. He called in air strikes to keep the North Vietnamese at bay, and while he was on the radio using his call sign, Tango Mike Mike, another bullet tore into his right thigh. Bleeding profusely, he called for another Huey to attempt an evacuation.

With the helicopter’s approach, Benavidez picked up an AK-47 lying on the ground and began firing as he dragged half the wounded men toward the open door. As the chopper lifted slightly to move closer to the remaining casualties, he ran beneath it, firing all the while. He grabbed a bag containing classified documents, codes and call signs from around Wright’s neck and took another bullet, this one in the abdomen. A second grenade blast sent searing shrapnel into his back. Almost simultaneously the helicopter pilot was shot dead and the Huey crashed. Benavidez made his way to the wreckage and pulled each of the wounded men out.

One of the wounded men asked, “Are you hurt bad, Sarge?” Benavidez responded, “Hell no! I’ve been hit so many times I don’t give a damn no more!”

As he continued to call in air strikes, their ordnance exploding dangerously close to the

Image: Alamy





*Prior to receiving the Medal of Honor in 1981, Master Sergeant Roy Benavidez walks into the Pentagon with President Ronald Reagan*

small group of wounded soldiers, Benavidez realized that time was running out. Despite the air support, the enemy was closing in. Another helicopter landed and he saw his last opportunity. Hoisting a mortally wounded Mousseau over his shoulder, he stepped toward the Huey. Suddenly, an enemy soldier charged, swinging his rifle butt into Benavidez's face and breaking his jaw, then drawing back to thrust the bayonet into his right hand. Benavidez grabbed the end of the rifle, pulled out his Bowie knife with his left hand, and stabbed the enemy soldier to death while sustaining another wound to his left forearm.

Benavidez gunned down two more North Vietnamese soldiers charging the helicopter from an angle obscuring the door gunner's field of vision. He continued to drag the wounded and dead to the helicopter, making a final desperate return to the former position to ensure that the evacuation was complete.

When he was finally pulled aboard the Huey, Benavidez had sustained 37 bullet, bayonet and shrapnel wounds. He was covered in blood and his eyes and mouth were nearly sealed shut.

By the time the chopper returned to Loc Ninh, Benavidez appeared dead. Attendants began

zipping him into a body bag, but a friend noticed a flicker of life and shouted, "That's Benavidez, get a doc!"

When the doctor arrived, he determined that the wounded sergeant was beyond help. "There's nothing I can do for him," he said. Benavidez mustered all his strength and managed to spit in the doctor's face. Then the doctor said, "He won't make it, but we'll try."

Benavidez did make it. Defying the odds, he was again transported to Brooke Army Hospital. His heroism was recognized as extraordinary, but it was feared he would die before the process of confirming a Medal of Honor award could be completed. An eyewitness account was necessary, and it was believed that all those who had seen Benavidez's courage that day had died. Instead, he received the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) from Army Chief of Staff General William Westmoreland.

After nearly a year in the hospital, Benavidez recovered and returned to active duty, serving at Fort Riley, Kansas, and Fort Sam Houston until his retirement in 1976. Meanwhile, as more details of his heroism emerged, Special Forces Lieutenant Colonel Ralph R. Drake championed the effort to upgrade his DSC to the Medal of Honor.

The process was stymied for several years. Then Brian O'Connor, a survivor of the Special Forces team that Benavidez fought to save, stepped forward. Long believed dead, O'Connor was living in Fiji in 1980 when a wire service article on Benavidez was picked up by an Australian newspaper. O'Connor read the story and then produced a ten-page account of the dreadful day, satisfying the requirement for eyewitness corroboration. On the strength of O'Connor's report the upgrade was swiftly made, and President Ronald Reagan presented the Medal of Honor to Benavidez during a ceremony at the Pentagon on February 24, 1981.

Roy Benavidez devoted his post-military years to the youth of America, speaking to groups of young people on citizenship and patriotism and encouraging them to stay in school. He also spoke out against government attempts to eliminate benefits for thousands of veterans and managed to halt the measures. He died on November 29, 1998, of respiratory failure and complications from diabetes. His body was interred at the Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery and his Medal of Honor is on display at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum in Simi Valley, California.





# JAMES STOCKDALE

The highest-ranking U.S. POW during the Vietnam War, this air wing commander was awarded the Medal of Honor for his bravery and leadership while incarcerated

WORDS: MURRAY DAHM

**J**ames Bond Stockdale (his middle name was his mother's maiden name), joined the U.S. Naval Academy as a 20 year old in 1943. After serving on several vessels, he was accepted for flight training in 1949, completing it in 1954. In 1959 he was sent to Stanford University as a 38-year-old naval pilot to study for a Master's Degree in international relations.

Stockdale became interested in philosophy, and especially in the ancient philosopher Epictetus, in his final year at university in 1962. He had been in the navy for more than 20 years already and had, he recalled, scarcely left the cockpit. Encouraged by a professor, Stockdale read the *Enchiridion of Epictetus* (a handbook of stoic behavior written in the first century BCE). It would have a profound influence on his thoughts and deeds for the rest of his life. No matter where he was stationed, by his bedside were a copy of Epictetus, Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (a more accessible account of Socrates' life than in Plato's dialogues), and Homer's epic poems the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. He credited Epictetus with changing his life and with his survival.

Stockdale then undertook what he called "three seven-month cruises to the waters off Vietnam" as the commander of Fighter Squadron 51, flying F-8 Crusaders and A-4 Skyhawks. He participated in the first-ever

bombing raid on North Vietnam (on August 5, 1964), flying off the Essex-class aircraft carrier U.S.S. Ticonderoga (CV-14). This raid on North Vietnam was in retaliation for the Gulf of Tonkin Incident on August 2, in which the U.S.S. Maddox had been attacked by three Vietnamese P-4 torpedo boats (although this has since been disputed by some historians). Stockdale had flown an F-8 (one of four) that engaged the enemy boats, and he was also in the air during the 'second incident' on August 4, when another attack by torpedo boats was reported. Stockdale recorded,

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**"I WHISPERED A 'CHANT' TO MYSELF AS I WAS MARCHED AT GUNPOINT TO MY DAILY INTERROGATION: 'CONTROL FEAR, CONTROL GUILT, CONTROL FEAR, CONTROL GUILT'"**

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**James Stockdale,  
Courage Under Fire**

however, that there were no enemy targets on August 4 and that the U.S. Navy was shooting at phantoms. Later, as a POW, he feared he might reveal that secret, but he never did. The raids on August 5 were in retaliation for the 'attack' on August 5—Stockdale's response: "Retaliation for what?"

During his third tour in 1965 Stockdale was involved in daily sorties as air wing commander, flying off the Essex-class U.S.S. Oriskany (CV-34), the 'Mighty O'. On September 9, 1965, he flew at 500 knots right into a flak trap at tree-top level. His blazing plane, with its control systems disabled, was impossible to steer and Stockdale ejected. He later recalled that he whispered to himself that he was entering the world of Epictetus. He estimated he would be a prisoner for at least five years: in fact he would be a POW for seven and a half.

Epictetus' teachings shaped how he would deal with his incarceration and his inhumane treatment. Those teachings were essential to separating within his mind the things within his control and those things beyond his control. Stockdale would put into effect this and many other of Epictetus' precepts during his time as a POW in Hoa Lo Prison, Hanoi, most commonly referred to as the 'Hanoi Hilton'.

As he descended by parachute, the North Vietnamese on the ground began shooting at him. When he landed, he was set upon and had his leg broken before the mob was called off him







by an officer. Before Stockdale had landed, he knew that there would be many things to come that would be out of his control; as a student of Epictetus, he would be tested to the extreme.

Stockdale knew he was going to become a prisoner and he was determined to behave differently to those men whose experiences he had seen reported in the aftermath of the Korean War, when it had been every man for himself among the POWs. Stockdale was determined that he would keep faith with his fellow prisoners, in keeping with Article 4 of *The U.S. Fighting Man's Code*, written in 1955 in the aftermath of the Korean War. The Code also stated that a U.S. soldier should give no information or take part in any action which might be harmful to his comrades. As a senior officer, he should take command (the chain of command was to be observed by American POWs). His actions as a prisoner would lead to his being awarded the Medal of Honor.

Although he was eventually given a pair of crutches, his leg never healed properly and Stockdale was treated brutally, as were his fellow POWs. His rank was never recognized by his captors, but he took command of 50 fellow pilots and navigators (calling them “backseat electronic wizards”). That number grew to more than 400 as the war progressed. Before any POW saw another American, all were subjected to a torture Stockdale called “taking the ropes”. This involved being bound with ropes, with hands tied behind the back and upper body jackknifed forward and down towards the ankles, which were held secure in lugs attached to an iron bar. Being restrained in this position stopped the circulation in the upper body and caused excruciating pain as well as a feeling of ever-increasing claustrophobia. In this state, men could be made to confess to almost anything. The procedure could be repeated at any time during captivity and was only one of the techniques of torture inflicted upon the POWs.

**“HE DELIBERATELY INFLICTED  
A NEAR-MORTAL WOUND TO  
HIS PERSON IN ORDER TO  
CONVINCE HIS CAPTORS OF HIS  
WILLINGNESS TO GIVE UP HIS  
LIFE RATHER THAN CAPITULATE”**

#### Medal of Honor citation

It was during such sessions that the prisoners were made to confess their ‘crimes’. Sessions of isolation often followed for the men to contemplate their ‘crimes’ and repent. These processes were often repeated. However, the idea that, once broken, a prisoner would not be subjected to such treatment again, or that the jailers would become bored of dishing out such cruelty, were fallacies. The breaking of any rule (of which there were many and which were often petty) would result in interrogation; such ‘crimes’ were called ‘black activities’. Stockdale was interrogated daily.

He later reflected that the repercussions of such treatment were much more damaging in terms of how the men saw themselves afterwards, judging themselves on how they had behaved and what they had said, rather than any long-lasting physical damage. Feelings of guilt and of betraying themselves, their country and their comrades were the most damaging—a broken limb was nothing in comparison. Stockdale was well aware that he would lose control on occasion under questioning; his response to those situations—contemplating what he was in control of—allowed him to recover.

One of the ways Stockdale demonstrated his outstanding leadership was in rehabilitating the men who felt like traitors after they were tortured. Later, he said that the men who didn’t make it out of incarceration in Vietnam were the optimists—those who thought rescue or the war’s end was imminent; they died of broken hearts when their brutal treatment continued interminably. The captors wanted the prisoners to repent for their ‘crimes’ and show shame, bowing to all in authority. This was resisted as much as possible and some of this resistance was active—Stockdale led a riot to get the prisoners out of leg irons, which resulted in him spending a year in isolation.

The prisoners used a (forbidden) method of communication involving a tap code, whereby the alphabet was organized into five groups of five letters (c and k occupying the same space) and the tap indicated the group and the letter in the group. This too was a technique from ancient history, the method first described by the historian Polybius in the second century BCE. The tap code allowed the prisoners to communicate but also to resist and form a society within the prison. The tap code was used to order men to undergo torture processes or to refuse to comply with the demands of their captors. Despite knowing the consequences, following such orders also allowed the POWs to have some control over their situation—they were in control of when they were tortured, not the people torturing them. Stockdale later called this “my kind of Stoicism”, where the prisoners were the masters of their own fate. He often issued his orders via the tap code using acronyms, one of the most common being ‘BACK US’, which stood for ‘Don’t Bow in public, stay off the Air, admit no Crimes, never Kiss them goodbye’. ‘US’ could be interpreted as United States, but it really meant ‘Unity over Self’.

Stockdale encouraged togetherness and the sense that all of the prisoners had to look out for one another. Even when being filmed,



James Stockdale pictured  
after his Medal of Honor  
ceremony at the White House

All images © Alamy





**Above:** Stockdale encouraged his fellow POWs to look out for one another and resist their Vietnamese captors



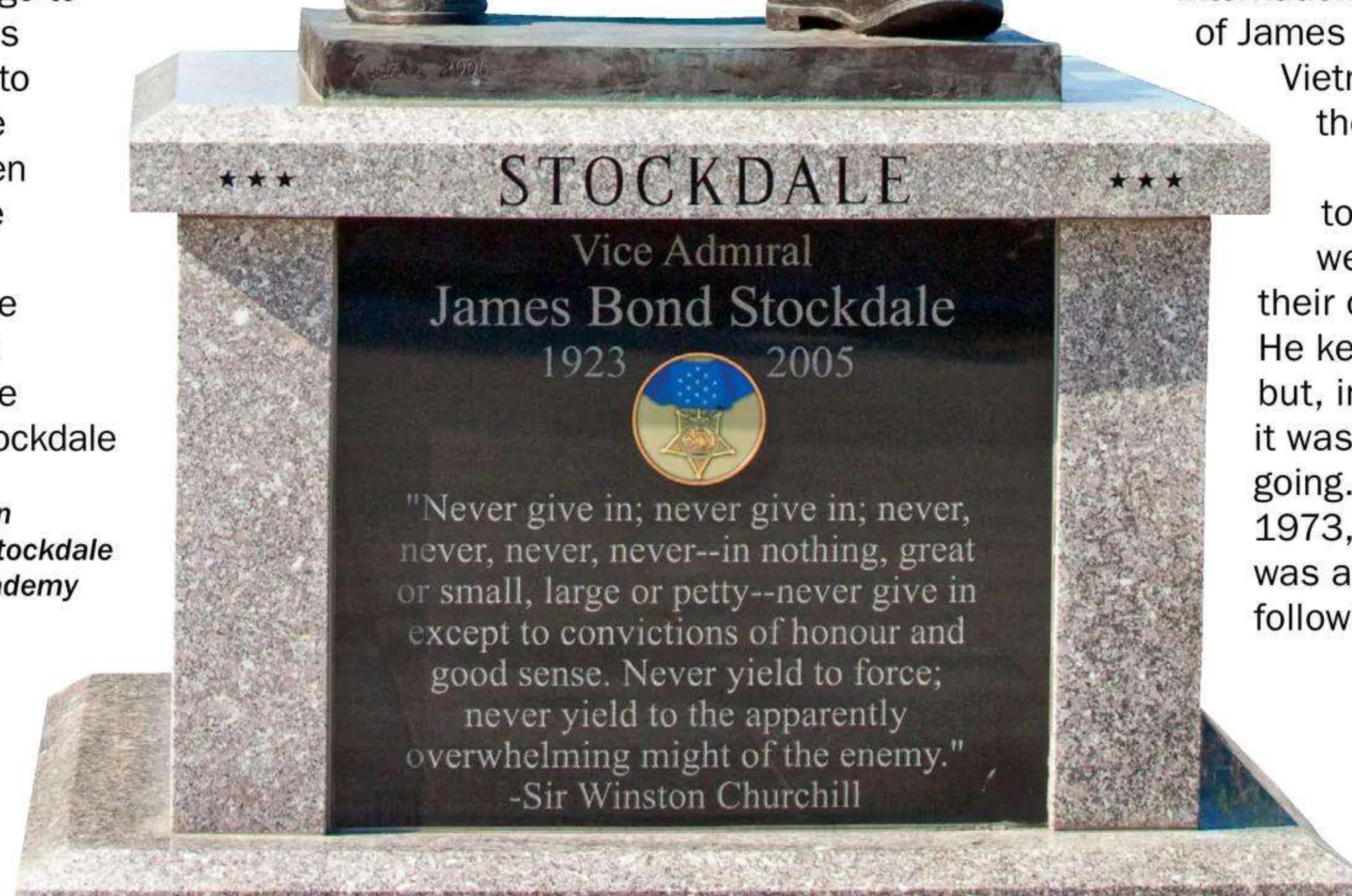
**Above:** American prisoners of war were subjected to brutal torture methods during their incarceration in the notorious Hanoi Hilton jail

some American airmen began to use double meanings in their sentences, gestures, and practical jokes to thwart and shame their captors. A few American POWs, less than five per cent, remained aloof from this society, never learned the tap code and chose to remain loners; these men were known as 'finks'. When back in the U.S., Stockdale attempted to have two of them put on trial for their complicit behavior while POWs but the government refused.

Stockdale had a cohort of ten others who helped him lead the prisoners. These were not necessarily all men of high rank but consisted of those who "refused to quit trying to be our brothers' keepers". These men were eventually isolated and singled out for especially harsh treatment to try and break the will of the other prisoners—most were subjected to three years solitary confinement, others to four. Stockdale was of the opinion that long-term isolation was more effective at breaking a man's will than torture—although some who'd experienced less solitary isolation disagreed and placed torture as a more potent method.

In the autumn of 1969, at the end of his fourth year as a POW, Stockdale was caught with a note containing a message to another prisoner. Knowing it was information that could be used to break other inmates, and aware that some fellow POWs had been killed in purges or where torture was taken too far, he decided to take drastic action. Left alone in the main torture room on the evening before he was due to be interrogated about the note, Stockdale

**Right:** Featuring a quote from Winston Churchill, a statue commemorating Stockdale stands at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland



remembered that Ho Chi Minh had just died (September 2, 1969). Sitting in a chair in leg irons, he was able to douse the light and wiggle the chair over to the window, the only one in the prison with glass. He smashed the window and slashed at his wrists with the shards. The guard found him passed out in a pool of blood, barely breathing.

Stockdale's Medal of Honor citation stated that he had risked his life while a POW, leading resistance to interrogation and refusing to participate in propaganda exploitation. The incident that most impressed this attitude on his captors was this deliberate self-mutilation, inflicting on himself a near-mortal wound that convinced his captors of his "willingness to give up his life rather than capitulate". The guard sounded the alert, summoned the doctor, and saved him. The realization that Stockdale was willing to sacrifice himself led to the better treatment of all U.S. POWs. He was revived in a room full of high-ranking North Vietnamese officers, and he later wrote that prison torture as they had known it ended that night in Hanoi.

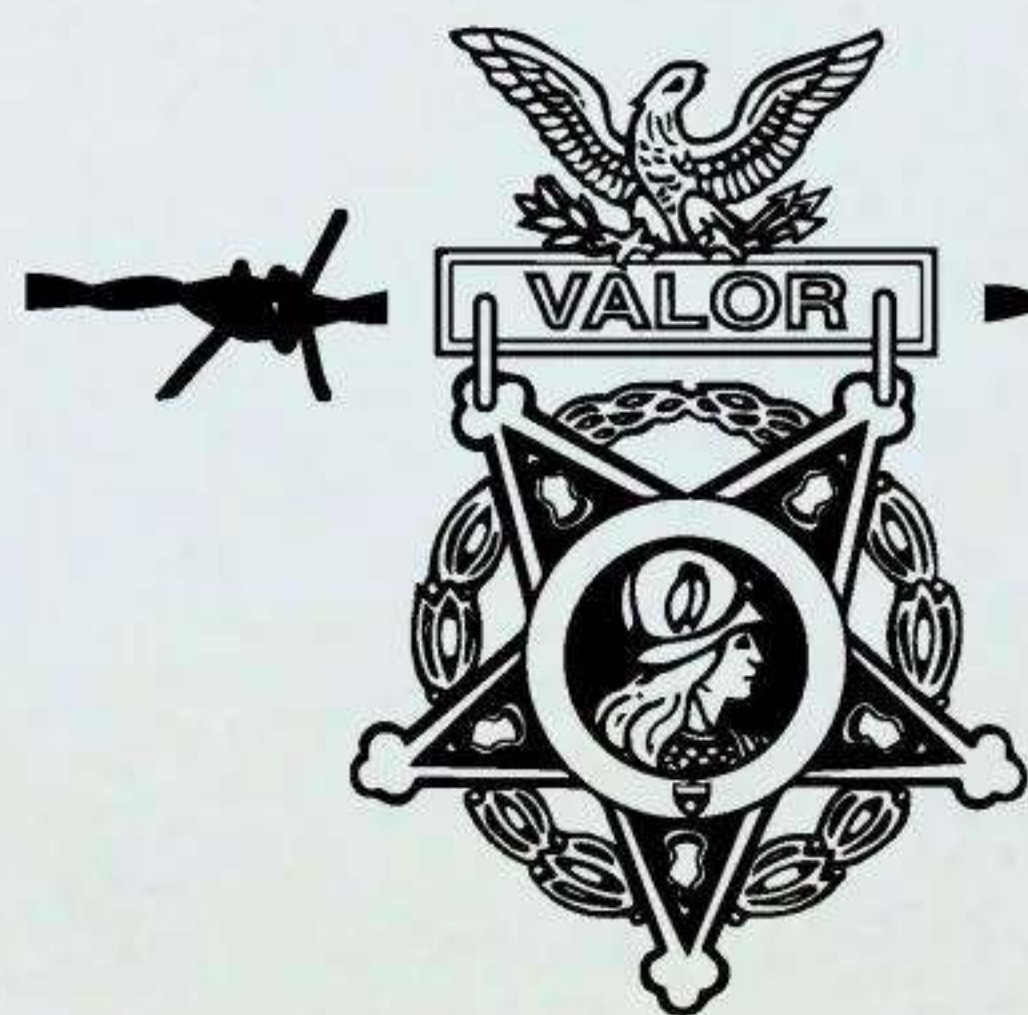
It was not until after the war that Stockdale learned that his wife, Sybil, had been making demands in Paris every week for the better treatment of POWs in Vietnam. She was on international news broadcasts and, as the wife of James Stockdale, the last thing the North Vietnamese needed was his death on their hands.

He never preached his philosophy to his fellow POWs. If his colleagues were doing okay, he knew they had their own beliefs and were applying them. He kept his Stoic philosophy to himself but, in addition to his incredible bravery, it was this philosophy that kept him going. He was released on February 12, 1973, during Operation Homecoming, and was among the first POWs repatriated following the Paris Peace Accords.









# DANGER IN THE DESERT

From the seething streets of Africa to the battlefields of the Middle East, U.S. troops have hunted warlords and neutralized terrorists in the struggle to defend the weak and protect the West





# DELTA



30 years ago, American special operations forces fought a brutal 17-hour battle in the streets of Mogadishu, Somalia. Two Delta snipers would give their lives to save their comrades from certain death and earn the highest military honor for their selfless courage

WORDS: LEIGH NEVILLE & CHARLES GINGER



**3** October 1993 will forever be remembered as the date of the Battle of Mogadishu. The focus of the Hollywood blockbuster *Black Hawk Down* and based on Mark Bowden's best-selling book of the same title, Operation Gothic Serpent culminated in what has been described as the "longest firefight involving American troops since Vietnam". A small contingent of U.S. special operations forces, principally drawn from the Rangers and Delta Force, battled several thousand armed Somalis as they attempted to recover the bodies of their fallen comrades from the ruined city.

For Delta, the Mogadishu mission began months earlier, as they were warned of a possible upcoming operation to capture Somali warlord Mohammed Farah Aideed. He had become a thorn in the side of the United

Nations humanitarian operation in Somalia, ambushing UN peacekeepers and pilfering supplies intended for the civilian victims of the drought and civil war that had ravaged the East African nation since 1991.

Along with the C-Squadron operators, Rangers from B-Company of 3rd Battalion, 75th Rangers, would provide the muscle to secure the target area, while Delta conducted the mission of capturing Aideed. They would be flown into action by the 160th 'Night stalkers' in heavily modified Black Hawks and Little Birds. Together they would be known as Task Force Ranger.

After intelligence showed that Aideed had gone into hiding, Task Force Ranger switched to a new target set—his Habr Gidr (clan) aides and lieutenants, in the hope of disrupting Aideed's organisation and potentially leading them to the man himself. On the morning of October 3, the

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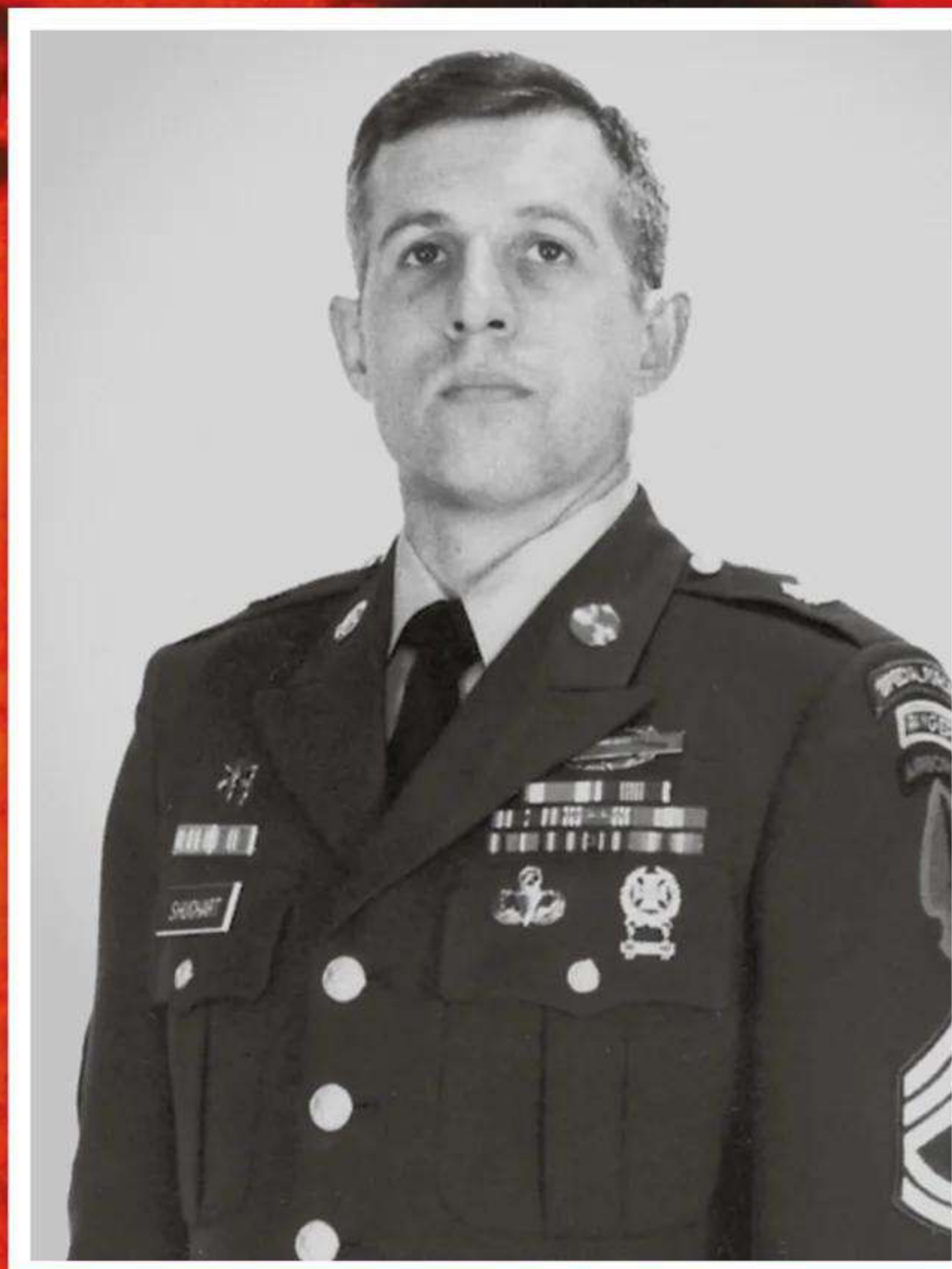
**"A SMALL CONTINGENT OF  
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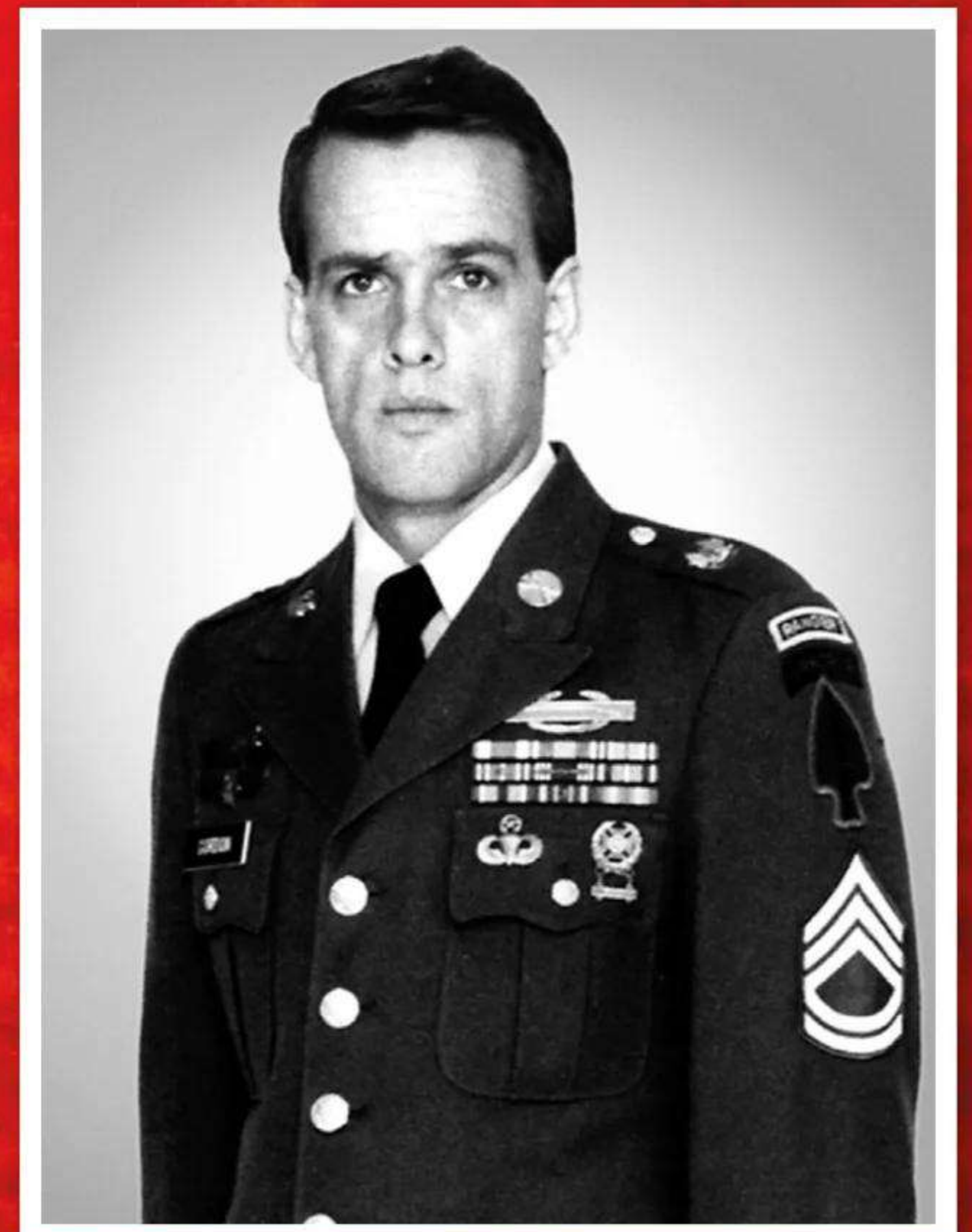
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# ATMOG



*Above: Sergeant First Class Randy Shughart was just 35 when he was killed defending Super 64*



*Above: Gary "Gordy" Gordon, 33, left behind wife Carmen and his two children, Brittany and Ian*





task force received actionable intelligence that Abdi Hassan Awale and Omar Salad Elmi, two top advisers to Aideed, were meeting that day near the Olympic Hotel in downtown Mogadishu.

The plan was straightforward. The 160th would land Delta and the Rangers at the target site. Delta would conduct the capture while the Rangers manned blocking positions on surrounding streets. A Ranger ground convoy in trucks and Humvees would drive to the target site and evacuate the combined Delta and Ranger force along with their prisoners. Time on the ground was to be no longer than 30 minutes to negate any organized resistance by the Somalis.

At 3.42 p.m. that Sunday afternoon, the first Little Bird touched down, depositing its Delta team into the street outside the target building. The tremendous amount of dust kicked up by the helicopters reduced visibility to a bare minimum as fire erupted around the target building. Returning it, C-Team entered the building and secured the prisoners quickly.

Delta gave the all clear and the Ranger ground convoy moved forward. As Delta loaded the prisoners onto the trucks, the amount of fire was increasing. The main convoy was preparing to depart when one of the orbiting helicopters, a Black Hawk with the radio call sign Super 61, was shot down over the city by an RPG, the missile striking its tail rotor. Black smoke streaming from its rear, the helicopter clipped a rooftop before plummeting into a street and rolling onto its side. Pilots Cliff 'Elvis' Wolcott and Donovan 'Bull' Briley died on impact (it's believed Wolcott purposely dipped the nose before hitting the ground to ensure that the front of the helicopter absorbed the brunt of the impact, thereby sparing the crew—Staff Sergeant Daniel Busch and Sergeant Jim Smith among them).

Horried by the sight of one of their choppers being downed, the majority of the Delta element immediately raced towards the crash site. As snipers tried to hold off the Somalis who were also sprinting for the stricken Black Hawk, their comrades on the ground fought their way towards the crash site, where a

Little Bird (call sign Star 41) has courageously landed near the downed helicopter to evacuate Smith and Busch, who were desperately trying to defend themselves. The latter sustained serious wounds while holding back the onrushing militants, and despite urgent efforts to save him, Busch didn't make it. His body was carried to the Little Bird while the other surviving members of the crew were tended to before being evacuated.

As the Little Bird lifted off from the crash site, the combat search-and-rescue (CSAR) helicopter Super 68 arrived overhead, and despite also being hit by an RPG its pilots, Dan Jollota and Herb Rodriguez, somehow managed to hold the chopper (which would later touch down safely in a friendly zone to the south) steady long enough for its mixed Delta, Ranger and U.S. Air Force team to fast-rope to the ground as the first Ranger squad, on foot from the target building, rounded the corner and began to establish defensive positions around Super 61. It seemed as though the situation was gradually being brought under control—and then disaster struck again.

Hovering above the city to provide covering fire, the troops onboard Black Hawk Super 64 may have spotted the nose of an RPG being aimed straight at them, but there was no time to take evasive action before it smashed into their tail and sent the chopper spiralling. Seconds later it crashed southwest of the target building.

Fastened to his seat and writhing in agony due to a snapped femur and several crushed vertebrae, pilot Michael Durant fired at numerous Somalis as they closed in around the wreck. Nursing similar injuries beside him was co-pilot Ray Frank. As for crew chiefs Tommy Fields and Bill Cleveland, Durant later recalled that "they were alive when we hit the ground."

With the CSAR team already committed and Somalis surrounding the second crash site, a pair of Delta snipers overhead in another Black Hawk (Super 62), Master Sergeant Gary Gordon and Sergeant First Class Randall Shughart, made an incredible call: they were going down to help their comrades.

Such was the severity of the situation that their request was rejected twice, but after Gordon insisted for a third time that they be inserted, the order was given to drop them into the fray. Jumping from their Black Hawk approximately 100 yards from Super 64, the courageous pair, equipped with their sniper rifles and pistols, fought their way through the streets.

After reaching Super 64 and finding the crew alive but badly injured, Gordon and Shughart carefully moved Durant to safety beside a shack and asked him to cover them from any enemy fighters who might attempt to sneak around the building via an alleyway and attack from behind. The pair then worked to move the rest of the crew away from the crash site before assuming positions either side of the helicopter and dropping several Somalis with lethal precision.

Gravely outnumbered, they fought valiantly to protect Durant and the rest of the crew as bullets ricocheted off the metal hulk of Super 64. And then one found Gordon. "Damn, I'm hit!" Durant doesn't remember hearing anything from him after that, but seconds later Shughart appeared beside him and handed over Gordon's gun. Bidding Durant good luck, he returned to the helicopter and continued to fire.

Above them, Super 62, which had been making devastating firing runs over the surrounding crowds, received a direct hit from an RPG that ripped the door gunner's leg off and injured most of the remaining crew. Remarkably, its pilot (who prior to the explosion had radioed to ask if anyone was able to come to Shughart's aid—he was informed that there wasn't) managed to nurse it to safety before crash-landing, but its withdrawal meant even less support for the lone sniper on the ground. After an hour that must have felt like an eternity, Shughart exhausted his ammunition and was overwhelmed along with three of the wounded crew members. Between them, the Delta snipers had killed at least 25 militants.

As for Durant, he was almost beaten to death by enraged locals when a member of the SNA (Somali National Alliance) intervened and took him prisoner. Later released and able to return home, he paid homage to the men who bravely volunteered to save him.

"Without a doubt, I owe my life to those two men and their bravery. Those guys came in when they had to know it was a losing battle. There was nobody else left to back them up. If they had not come in, I wouldn't have survived."

The Super 61 crash site was finally secured as the Sun went down, but the men charged with freeing the body of Cliff Wolcott were harassed by gunfire throughout the night. With their fallen brother recovered, the task force departed in a joint U.S. and UN convoy. As the vehicles were fully loaded, some of the troops were forced to endure the 'Mogadishu Mile', running out of the city before eventually being picked up by Ranger Humvees and driven back to base.

On a horrendous day that saw Task Force Ranger suffer 16 killed (five from Delta, five from the 160th SOAR, and six from the Rangers) and an incredible 83 wounded, two heroic snipers had given their lives to save their comrades. Their sacrifice would later be acknowledged with the posthumous awarding of the Medal of Honor. Their names and the memory of their courage will never die.



The wreckage of Super 64 and the site of the last stand of Delta snipers Shughart and Gordon





*The carnage of the Battle of Mogadishu as depicted in the film 'Black Hawk Down'*

*Gary Gordon's widow, Carmen, receives his Medal of Honor from President Bill Clinton*







Africa and the Middle East

# SALVATORE A. GIUNTA

This U.S. Army sergeant saved a comrade from Taliban fighters in the infamous Korengal Valley of eastern Afghanistan

WORDS: LEIGH NEVILLE

Staff Sergeant Salvatore “Sal” Augustine Giunta was born in Iowa, on January 21, 1985. While working at a Subway fast food restaurant, he heard a radio advertisement offering free T-shirts at the local U.S. Army recruiters. He later joked, “I like free T-shirts.” After giving the idea some thought, he eventually signed on the dotted line, joining the U.S. Army in 2003 and becoming a paratrooper the following year. Surprisingly, considering later events, Giunta washed out of the Army’s elite Ranger School before he was posted to the storied B (Battle) Company of 2nd Battalion, the 503rd Airborne Infantry Regiment.

Based in Vicenza, Italy, the 503rd Regiment was known as ‘the Rock’ in recognition of its legendary combat jump onto the Japanese island fortress of Corregidor in February 1945. It was also one of the first U.S. Army infantry units to be deployed to Vietnam, where it received Presidential and Meritorious Unit Citations. The unit has since served in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

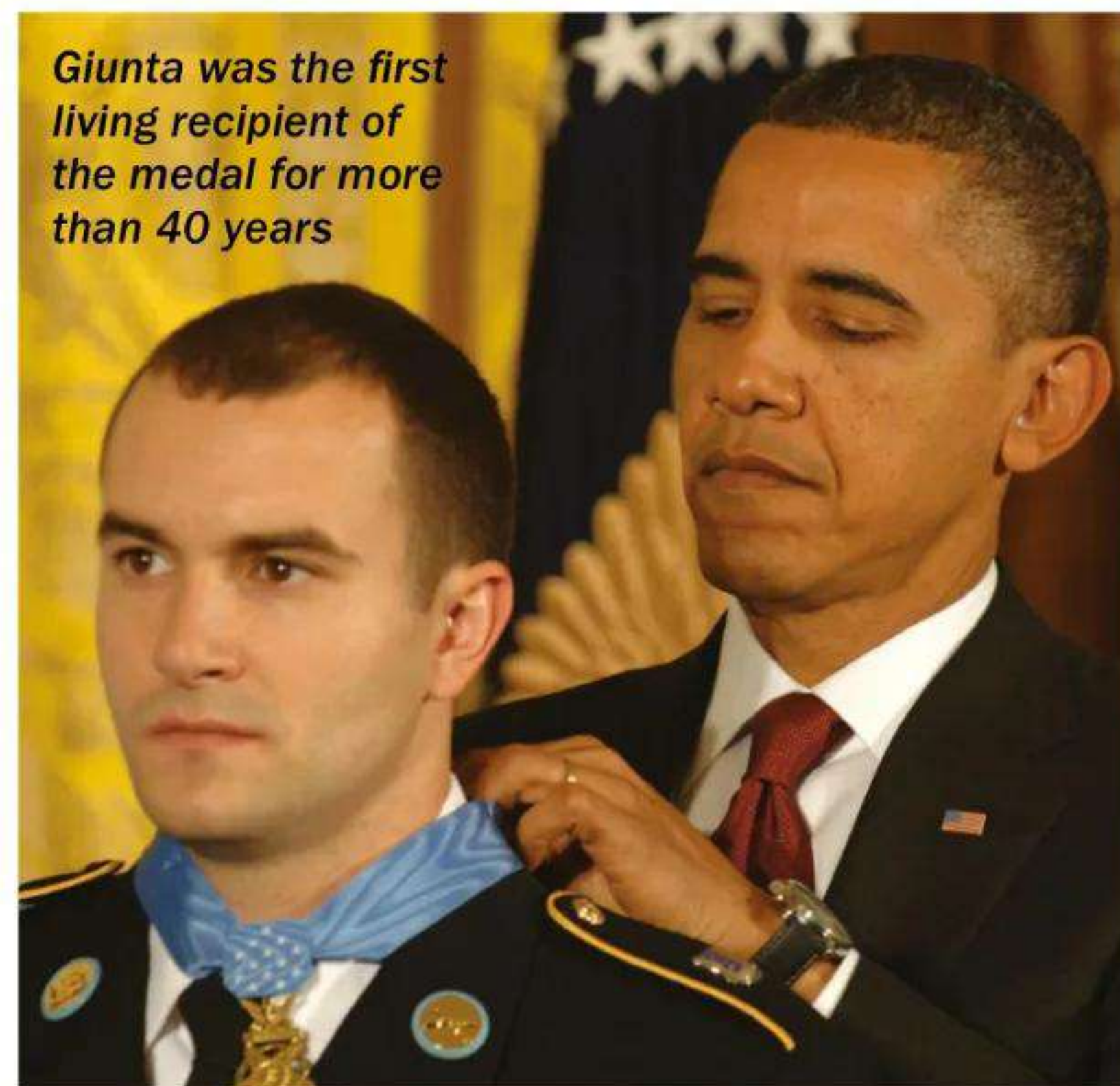
Giunta’s first deployment to Afghanistan was for a year-long tour beginning in March 2005 based in the city of Kandahar. For the first three months his unit was assigned as the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) for southern Afghanistan, ready to rescue trapped soldiers—a role that sounded more adventurous than it proved to be. Later, he and his unit were moved to a remote base at the foot of the Hindu Kush Mountains where Giunta experienced his first combat action during a Taliban ambush.

Giunta also suffered his first experience with the often duplicitous Afghan National Police (ANP) when an argument ended in the Afghan Police aiming their AK-47s at the American forces. He was even ordered to man a heavy machine gun and be ready to open fire on the

ANP if necessary. He was later awarded his first Purple Heart after being wounded by shrapnel in a firefight with insurgents.

Deciding military life wasn’t for him, Giunta prepared to put in his paperwork but was ‘stop-lossed’; a process that forces a soldier to stay in the army, in this case because of the strain placed on manpower thanks to the dual wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Giunta soon deployed to Afghanistan again for a 14-month tour starting in May 2007, serving as a fire team leader.

The location his unit deployed to—the infamous Korengal Valley—has since become widely known thanks to the documentary film *Restrepo*, which detailed that horrific tour. From the incongruously named Outpost Vegas, Giunta and his fellow soldiers patrolled across the inhospitable mountains and forests of the Korengal, being regularly ambushed and engaging in long-range firefights with the Taliban. In October 2007, Operation Rock Avalanche was launched in a hunt for insurgent weapons caches.



Giunta was the first living recipient of the medal for more than 40 years

Four days into the previously uneventful mission, a sister platoon was ambushed. One soldier was killed and two seriously wounded. The audacious insurgents even managed to steal the men’s weapons and night-vision goggles. On October 25, 2007, Battle Company deployed on a follow-up mission to attempt to recover those stolen weapons.

Giunta’s platoon, the 1st Platoon of Battle Company, was assigned to provide overwatch from the mountainous heights above Battle Company’s 2nd and 3rd Platoons while they searched through an Afghan village in the valley below. Giunta’s squad, 1st Squad, was in the lead. After a day of no enemy contact, they were headed home to their Combat Outpost along the narrow Gatigal Spur as night fell.

Suddenly, the encroaching darkness erupted with a cacophony of gunfire. More than a dozen Taliban insurgents opened up on the patrol with rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and machine guns. The insurgents had sprung what is known as an ‘L-shaped ambush’ that allowed them to fire along the length of the patrol at the soldiers who had been moving in single file to reduce the effects of any mortars or improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Sergeant Joshua Brennan, acting as lead scout, was immediately hit, as was the second soldier in the patrol, Specialist Frank Eckrode, a squad automatic weapon (SAW) gunner. Giunta himself was hit by a bullet in the initial fusillade that was stopped by his body armor. A second bullet tore through the assault pack he was wearing on his back.

Giunta quickly understood that his men were receiving accurate fire from at least two directions and ordered his SAW gunner, Private Kaleb Casey, and his grenadier, Private Garrett Clary, to spread out to ensure the enemy could not flank their position. Meanwhile, Staff



*Pictured here in Italy, Giunta almost quit the army but was forced to stay due to the stop-loss policy*

★  
“YOU CHARGED FORWARD  
THROUGH EXTREME ENEMY  
FIRE, EMBODYING THE WARRIOR  
ETHOS THAT SAYS, “I WILL NEVER  
LEAVE A FALLEN COMRADE.”  
YOUR ACTIONS DISRUPTED A  
DEVASTATING AMBUSH BEFORE IT  
COULD CLAIM MORE LIVES”  
★

President Barack Obama







“I WISH I HAD PROCESSED THE IMAGE SOONER; MAYBE THEN I COULD HAVE KILLED THEM BOTH”

**02 The ambush** Suddenly, over a dozen hidden Taliban open fire on the American patrol. Using at least four PKM machine guns and several RPGs, the ambush temporarily stuns the Americans, who desperately try to find cover among the trees and rocks with enemy fire directed at them from seemingly every direction.

**06 Medevac** Another medic arrives and stabilizes Brennan while a medevac helicopter lands to evacuate the wounded. As Giunta and his comrades withdraw, B1B bombers and Apache helicopter gunships lay waste to the Taliban firing positions. Sadly, Giunta's courageous efforts are in vain and Brennan dies in surgery.

**04 Fighting back** Staff Sergeant Erick Gallardo, just ahead of Giunta, tries to make it to the wounded but is shot in the head. Giunta breaks cover to drag him to safety. Gallardo's helmet saves him. Giunta leads him and two of his men in a counterattack to reach the wounded.

**05 The rescue** After reaching Eckrode, Giunta heads off to find Brennan. Two Taliban have captured him and are carrying him away. Giunta kills one of the insurgents and wounds the other, saving Brennan from a grisly fate. Giunta provides first aid while waiting for the platoon medic, who, unknown to Giunta, has already been killed.



## “WE WOULD HAVE FOUGHT TOOTH AND NAIL TO FIND HIS BODY OR FIND BRENNAN. GIUNTA DEFINITELY SAVED A LOT MORE LIVES THAT NIGHT”

### Staff Sergeant Erick Gallardo

Sergeant Erick Gallardo attempted to reach the wounded men at the head of the column, but was driven back by heavy enemy fire. Running back toward Giunta, Gallardo was hit in the helmet by an AK-47 round and fell.

Seeing this, Giunta braved the incoming RPGs and small arms fire to drag him back into cover. Thankfully, Gallardo's helmet had done its job and the bullet had only grazed his head—moments later he was back in the fight. Giunta, Gallardo and Clary began throwing hand grenades at the enemy positions, using their muzzle flashes to guide them, while Casey kept up withering suppressive fire with his SAW. They were determined to reach Brennan and the trapped Eckrode (whose SAW had jammed).

Finally, the group reached the wounded Eckrode, who had been shot four times. Two of the bullets had also been stopped by his body armor. Giunta said in his 2012 autobiography, *Living With Honor*, “the grenades had paid off. They're loud and they're scary and they make things blow up. It's hard to keep firing an AK-47 on target with grenades blowing up all around you.” Although the enemy was still shooting, the fire had slackened somewhat, allowing Giunta the opportunity to move forward to search for the fallen Sergeant Brennan. The problem was, in the chaos of the ambush, he had disappeared.

Still being shot at, Giunta broke through some foliage to an incredible scene. Three figures were moving away from the ambush. He could just make out two were wearing Afghan clothing (the shalwar kameez) and carrying AK-47s. The third figure had their hands and feet tied and was being carried by the other two. Giunta recognized the camouflage uniform and realized it was Sergeant Brennan who had been captured by the Taliban.

Aiming his M4 carbine, he opened fire. “I wish I had processed the image sooner; maybe then I could have killed them both. As it was, I killed one—he dropped on the spot—and hit the other. The wounded man limped away and then disappeared—it looked as though he leaped off a cliff or at least rolled down a steep

embankment; either way, I hope he was dead by the time he reached bottom,” Giunta wrote later.

Rushing to the wounded Sergeant Brennan, Giunta dragged him back into cover as the Taliban fire again intensified. Calling for a medic, Giunta kept Brennan alive, reassuring him that help was on its way. Unknown to Giunta at the time, the platoon medic, Specialist Hugo ‘Doc’ Mendoza, had been hit in the femoral artery in the initial ambush and was already dead. Eventually, another medic from one of the other platoons arrived and performed an emergency tracheotomy on Brennan to stabilize him enough for medical evacuation (medevac).

Brennan had been shot a half dozen times and had suffered shrapnel injuries from the RPGs. Under the covering fire of Apache helicopter gunships, a medevac helicopter briefly touched down to evacuate Brennan, Eckrode and several other wounded. Although Brennan reached the field hospital in time, he subsequently died from his wounds. That night, back at the Combat Outpost, Giunta's company commander began the paperwork to nominate Giunta for the Medal of Honor.

Giunta and 1st Platoon finally rotated out of the Korengal in July 2008. A few years later the U.S. Army closed its remote outposts and withdrew from the valley. In November 2010, Giunta was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Barack Obama. He attended the ceremony at the White House with his wife and a large number of his platoon mates. Giunta finally left the U.S. Army in 2011.

He claims his actions were unremarkable: “I didn't run up to do anything heroic. Everybody's been shot at, and I might as well run forward,” he said in an U.S. Army interview. He concedes it was “one of the worst days of my life, and when I revisit it... It kind of guts me a little bit more every time. It's a huge honor... but it does bring back memories of all the people I'd love to share this moment with who are no longer with us.” At the time of its awarding, Giunta was the first living Medal of Honor recipient since the Vietnam War.

### 03 Wounded in action

Both Brennan and Eckrode are shot and wounded. Other casualties are suffered in 2nd and 3rd squads. Giunta moves his men into cover and begins to fire back. He knows they have been caught in a classic L-shaped ambush and redeploys his men to make sure that the enemy cannot flank them.

### 01 The patrol

Giunta's six-man group from 1st Squad moves along a narrow mountaintop spur as darkness begins to fall in the Korengal Valley. Traveling in single-file, Sergeant Joshua Brennan is in the lead followed by SAW gunner Specialist Frank Eckrode. Giunta is fourth in line, scanning the growing shadows with his M4 carbine.

Staff Sergeant Giunta and his squad mates in Korengal Valley, known as the ‘Valley of Death’







# THOMAS PAYNE

How one U.S. Army Ranger's "extraordinary heroism" helped save 75 Iraqi hostages from a brutal execution

WORDS: NEIL CROSSLEY

**J**ust before dawn on November 22, 2015, a team of blacked-out CH-47 Chinook helicopters flew low towards a heavily fortified compound just north of the town of Hawija, in Kirkuk Province, northern Iraq.

Onboard were troops from the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, a unit that specializes in counterterrorism missions. Also onboard were Kurdish Peshmerga commandos—'Those Who Face Death'. The aim of this mission, conducted jointly with the Kurdish CTG (Counter-Terrorism Group), was to rescue 75 Iraqi hostages who had been captured and imprisoned by ISIS fighters and were facing imminent execution.

As the Chinooks landed their rotors whipped up a complete 'brown-out' of dust into the night sky. The ramps were lowered and boots hit the ground, with soldiers using night-vision goggles to navigate their way towards the compound as quickly as possible.

What followed was an intense firefight. There were numerous acts of bravery, but one courageous soldier, Thomas Patrick Payne, a sergeant first class assigned to the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, would be singled out for his "extraordinary heroism and selfless actions".

Payne would later be awarded the Medal of Honor in recognition of his valor, the zenith of a career distinguished by courage, honor and an unwavering commitment to serving his country and defending those in need.

Thomas Patrick Payne was born in South Carolina on April 2, 1984, and grew up in the towns of Batesburg-Leesville and Lugoff. His father is a police officer, his mother a

schoolteacher and his two brothers serve in the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Army.

Both towns are close to Fort Jackson and the area is steeped in military pride. "As a kid, I wanted to be like a G.I. Joe," Payne remembered in an article on the U.S. Army's official website. "I was always fascinated with the military."

After 9/11, Payne applied to join the Marine Corps, but his mother refused to sign his waiver to enlist. At 18, he had set his heart on joining the Army Rangers after watching a documentary about the elite unit.

In 2002, Payne graduated from Lugoff-Elgin High School and on July 25 that year enlisted

in the U.S. Army as an infantryman, completing One Station Unit Training, the Basic Airborne Course and the Ranger Indoctrination Programme (RIP) at Fort Benning, Georgia.

His prospects had initially not looked good. Weighing just 120 pounds, few believed he would pass the Ranger Indoctrination Programme. "I was a pretty skinny kid," recalled Payne. "Even my recruiters said, 'You were our last pick, we didn't expect you to make it.'"

They were proved spectacularly wrong. In 2003, Payne became an Army Ranger with the 75th Infantry Regiment, the U.S. Army's premier large-scale special operations force.

He served as a sniper and team leader in the 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, until late 2007, when he was assigned to the U.S. Army Special Operations Command.

Payne would go on to be deployed 17 times in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, Operation Inherent Resolve, and Operation Resolute Support, and to the United States Africa Command area of responsibility.

In 2010, he received a Purple Heart for a wound he sustained in Afghanistan from a grenade. Out of action with a broken knee, he struggled to overcome the injury.

"I wasn't really pushing myself....," he remembered. "I had to come away with a vengeance and push it every single day." Payne recovered, and less than two years later, along with his teammate Master Sergeant Kevin Foutz, won the grueling Army's Best Ranger Competition.

In early November 2015, Payne and his unit were completing a tour of duty in Iraq



**Above:** Sergeant Major Thomas Patrick Payne receiving the Medal of Honor from U.S. President Donald Trump on September 11, 2020



*Payne's heroic actions during one of the biggest hostage rescue operations in history earned him a recommendation for the Medal of Honor*

★  
“ONCE WHEELS ARE DOWN ON THE OBJECTIVE AND THE RAMP DROPS, THAT’S WHEN YOUR TRAINING TOTALLY TAKES OVER”  
★

Thomas Patrick Payne





The battle for Hawija was fierce and left a trail of destruction through the town

when a request came in from the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq. 75 hostages, including 20 Iraqi security forces personnel, had been captured and would soon be killed by ISIS fighters inside a prison in Hawija.

“Our partners came to us for assistance and we’re not going to let them down,” Payne said. “Time was of the essence.”

Payne was part of a joint task force in Erbil that spent a week planning, rehearsing and preparing for the rescue of the threatened hostages. When they received word that fresh graves had been dug for the mass execution of the captives, they were given the green light to move out.

Early in the morning of October 22, 2015, CH-47 Chinook helicopters carrying the joint task force of U.S. Special Forces Command and Kurdish commandos lifted off. According to a report on the U.S. Army website, the flight was “eerily quiet” until the pilots gave the one-minute call.

“That’s when you make that transition from soldier to warrior,” writes Payne. “Once wheels are down on the objective and the ramp drops, that’s when your training totally takes over.”

Intelligence reported that the hostages were being held in two buildings inside the heavily fortified compound. Payne and his team were responsible for clearing one of them.

Dust and smoke billowed everywhere when they hit the ground, making it virtually impossible to see. The Kurdish commandos had unsuccessfully tried to blast open the prison wall with explosives, and a firefight was already raging around Payne and his team as they made their way to the first building. They were setting up their ladders when the call came over the radio that a man was down.

The wounded soldier was Master Sergeant John Wheeler, a dedicated leader who had moved ahead to help the Kurdish partner force. He was pinned down by a barrage of enemy bullets. Payne’s medic attempted to provide aid but Wheeler’s wounds proved fatal. He was the first American serviceman killed in Iraq since the U.S. military withdrew from the country in 2011.

Payne and his team threw a ladder against the wall and climbed over into the enemy

★

**“ONCE YOU’RE ABLE TO CONTROL YOUR FEAR, THAT’S THE BRIDGE TO PERSONAL COURAGE AND PERSONAL COURAGE IS CONTAGIOUS ON THE BATTLEFIELD”**

★

**Thomas Patrick Payne**

stronghold. They encountered and suppressed resistance at the prison building and then cut the locks on cell doors. As the heavy doors



Above: A rocket is fired by Iraqi forces at IS insurgents during the conflict that decided who would control the town of Hawija

swung open they saw nearly 40 hostages bundled into the cells.

“You can see their faces light up,” recalled Payne. “Some of them are taken aback that they’re seeing our partner force and Americans all in the same room.”

At that point, an urgent call came over the radio from task force members still being engaged in the second building. Payne and a fellow soldier ran 30 yards over to the second building. The pair were targeted by enemy machine-gun fire from below, so they scaled a ladder to the rooftop, where they engaged the enemy with grenades and small-arms fire.

Smoke billowed out onto the rooftop and enemy gunfire targeted them from the west. Then they heard insurgents below them screaming, “Allahu akbar!”

“The enemy initiated multiple suicide vests right beneath our feet,” recalled Payne. The building rocked with the blasts from the devices, and Payne and his teammate made their way onto the ground outside the second building. They used explosives to gain entry through the windows but failed to puncture the sheets of metal and plywood.

Payne moved towards the initial breach point where a few members of the partner forces had just been wounded. As the barricaded enemies fired rounds towards him, he grabbed the bolt cutters and re-entered the building as other task force members covered him. “Your personal courage is just feeding off of each other,” he recalled. “At that point, it’s snowballing.”

Inside the smoke-filled building he encountered a fortified door. Despite struggling to breathe, Payne again exposed himself to enemy fire, as well as suffocating black smoke, to cut the lock and reach the trapped hostages. “We had to use speed to our advantage,” he said.

When the building began to collapse, the evacuation order was given. Payne directed the large group of hostages to safety, at one point grabbing a stunned man who was so paralyzed by fear that he couldn’t move and pulled him down the hallway.

The combined task force created a human barricade against enemy fire so the hostages could be safely moved from the damaged





THOMAS PAYNE

IS forces torched oil fields on their retreat from Hawija as they fled the advancing Iraqi soldiers

CH-47 Chinooks were key in Payne's operation, transporting U.S. and Kurdish troops to the IS stronghold under the cover of night



and unstable building. Each time Payne and the other soldiers returned fire, the hostages stopped running due to their fear and confusion, so Payne's team held their fire, putting themselves at huge risk to shield the hostages and get them safely out.

As the Chinook helicopters arrived the task force helped the hostages to swiftly board and escape. It was so cramped in the cabins that Payne and his team had to stand the whole way back to Erbil.

The mission remains one of the largest hostage rescues in history, and for his brave actions that day Sergeant First Class Thomas Payne was recommended for the Medal of Honor.

On September 11, 2020, Payne, who was by then a sergeant major, was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Donald Trump at a ceremony at the White House.

The citation concluded that "his extraordinary heroism and selfless actions were key to liberating 75 hostages during a contested rescue mission that resulted in 20 enemies killed in action."

In a presentation to West Point Cadets on March 17, 2021, Payne said, "Once you're able to control your fear, that's the bridge to personal courage and personal courage is contagious on the battlefield."

On July 6, 2022, at a Pentagon Hall Of Heroes ceremony, Payne highlighted the actions and bravery of his fellow commandos. "My teammates, the heroes of the Hawija hostage actions, are the epitome of selfless service," he said.

He also paid tribute to the gallantry of Master Sergeant Josh Wheeler, 39, who was posthumously awarded the Silver Star, Purple Heart and the Medal of Patriotism and in life had earned 11 Bronze Star Medals.

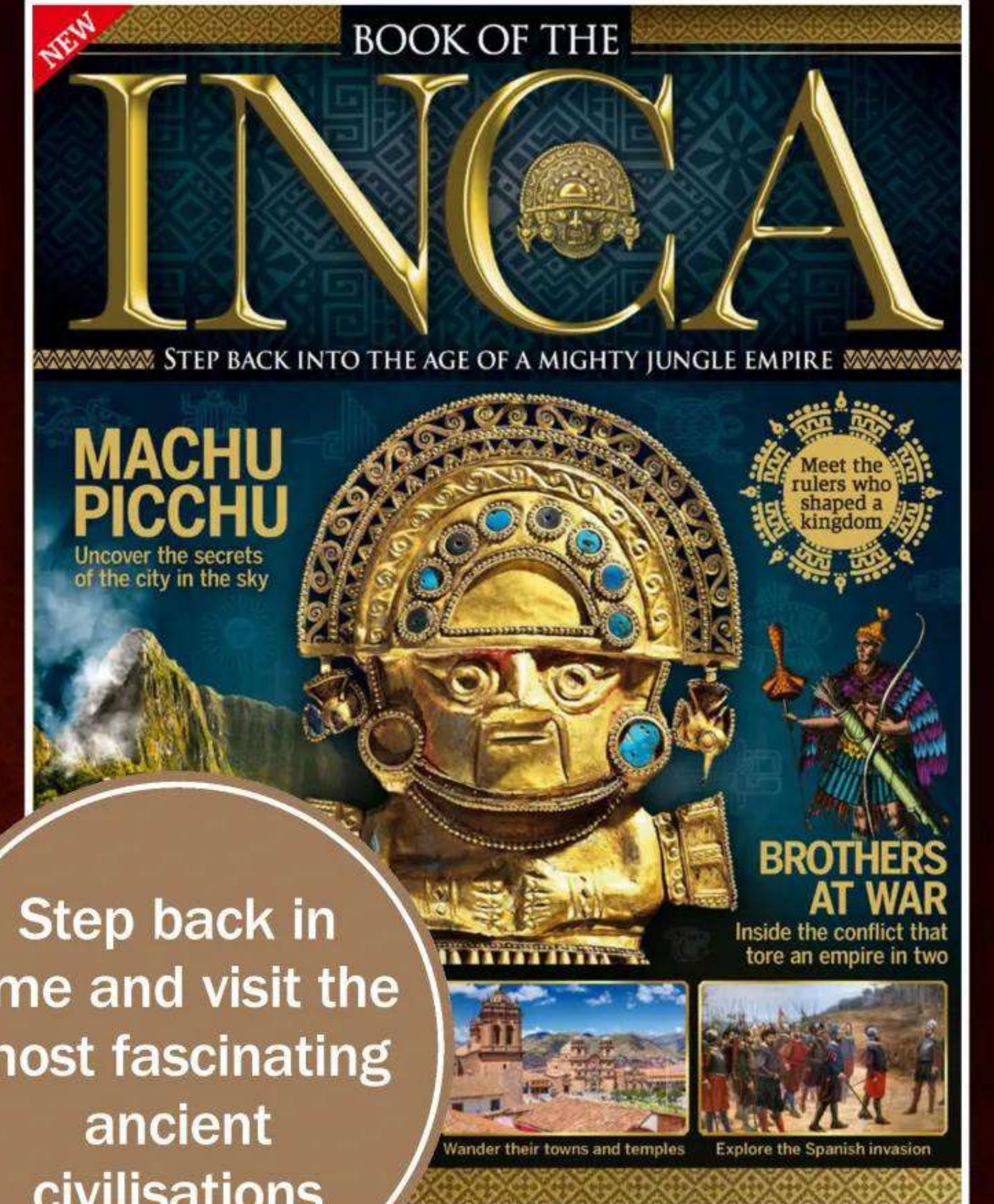
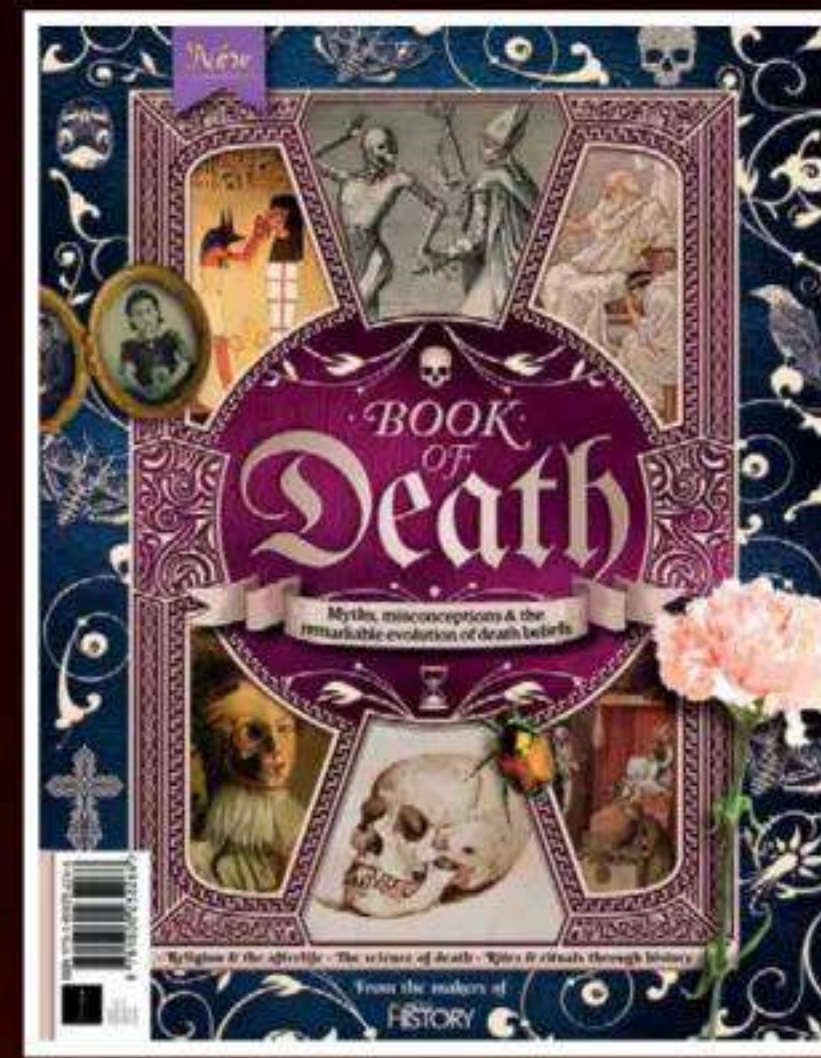
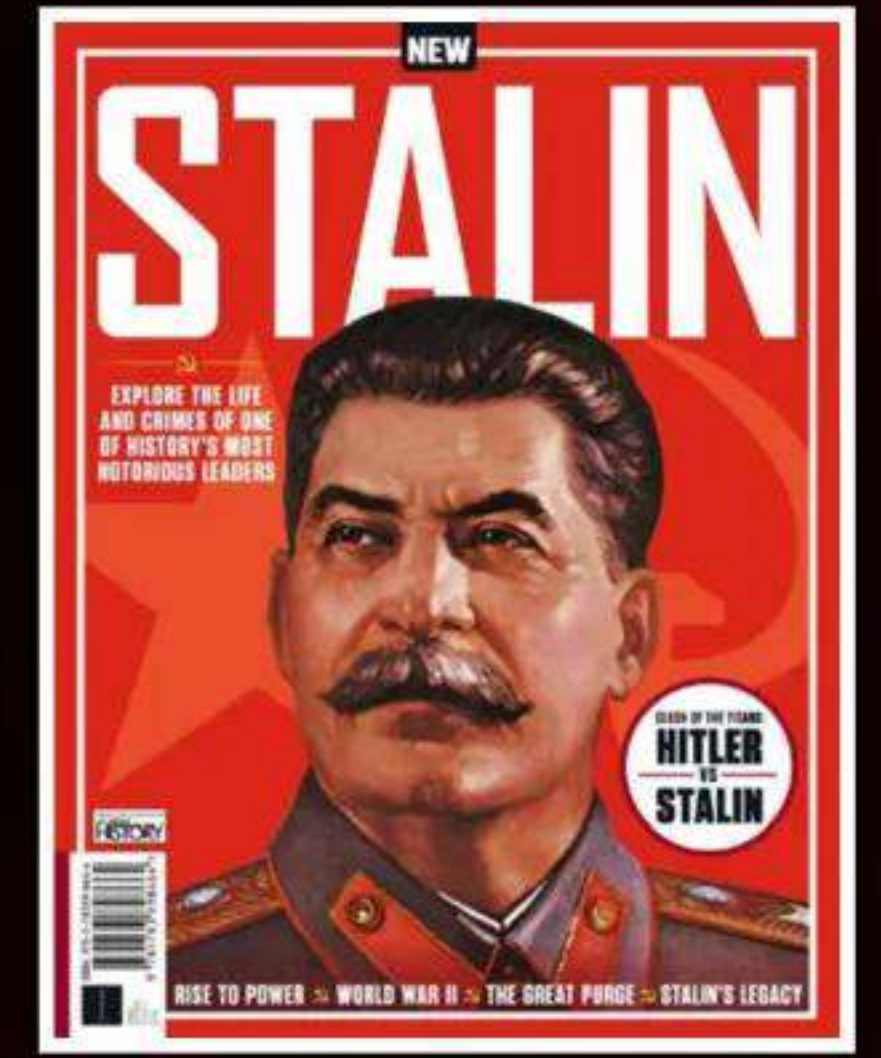
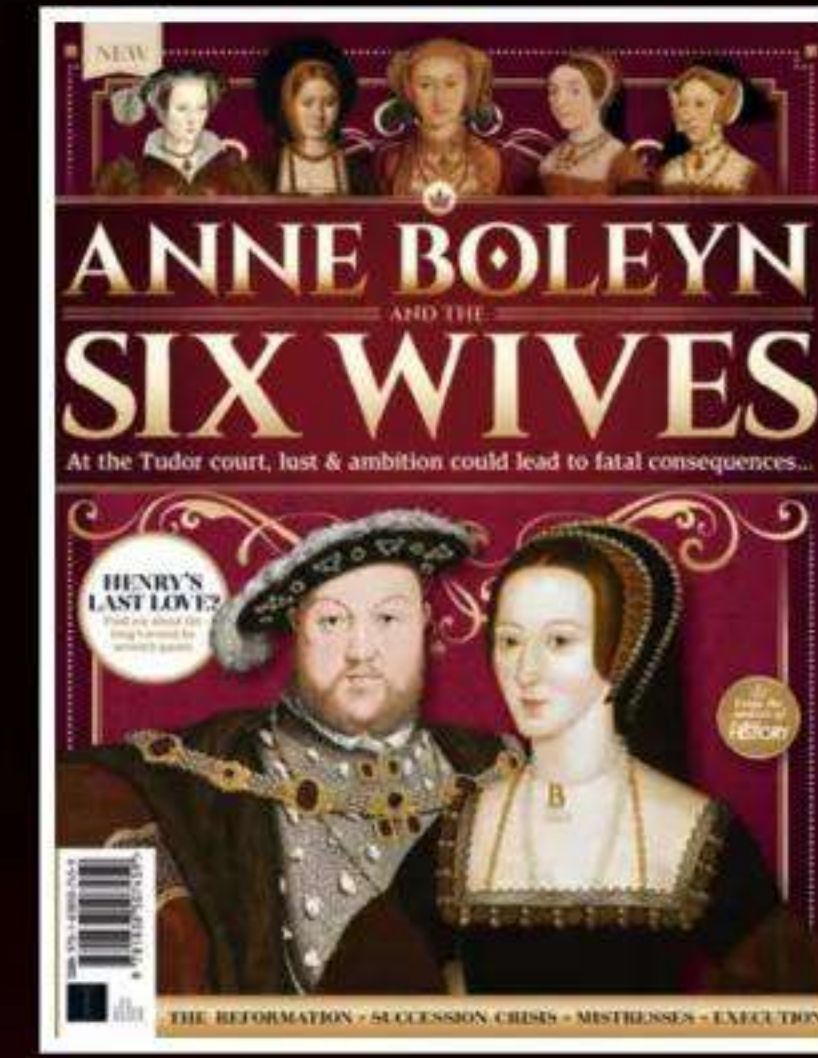
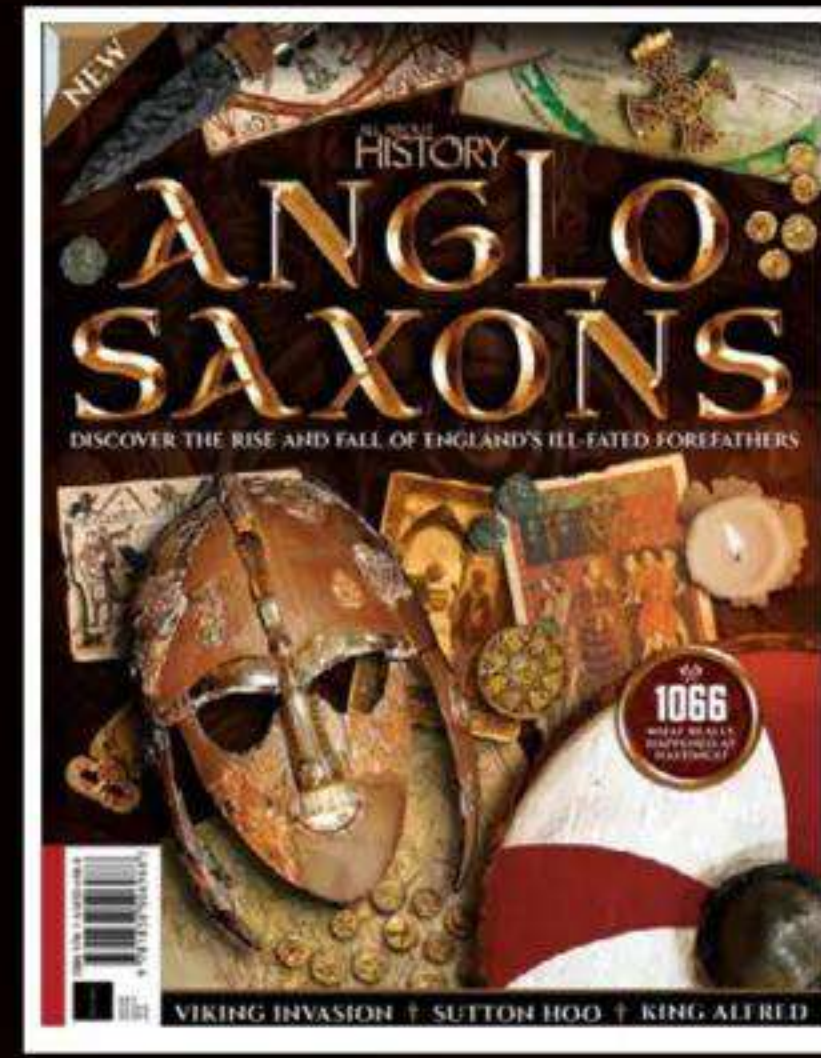
"Master Sergeant Wheeler knew what had to be done and he did not hesitate. Josh gave the command, 'On me,'... the command that leaders give to lead, motivate and inspire on the field of battle... and those were his last words as he led the way running towards the sound of guns.

"Josh's actions set the standard that it was our duty to liberate the oppressed and complete the mission."

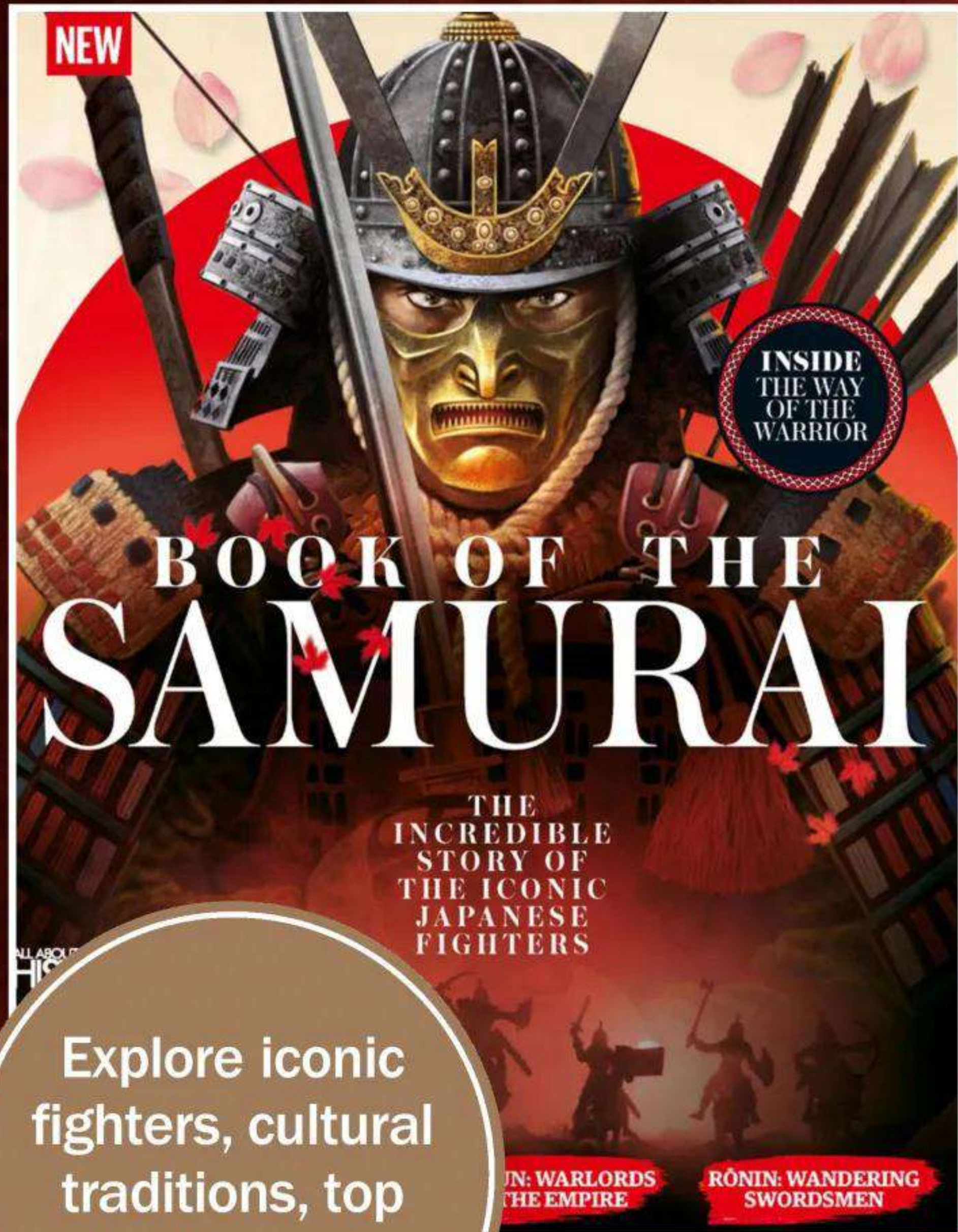
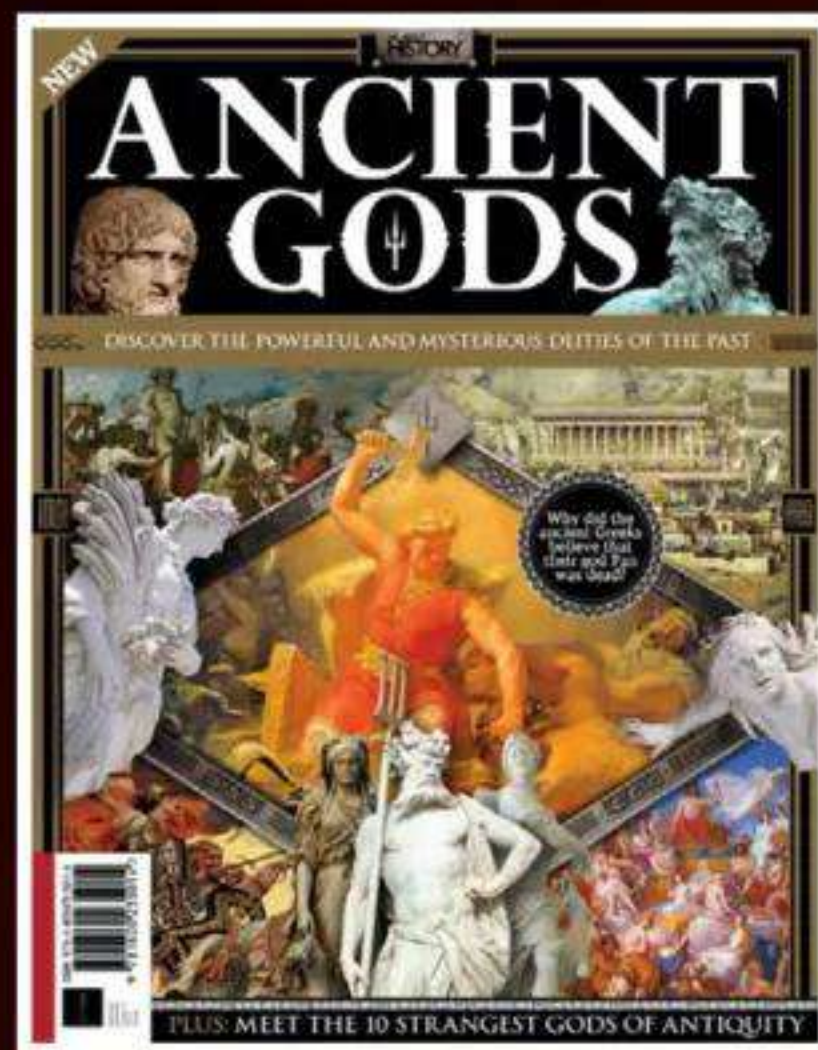
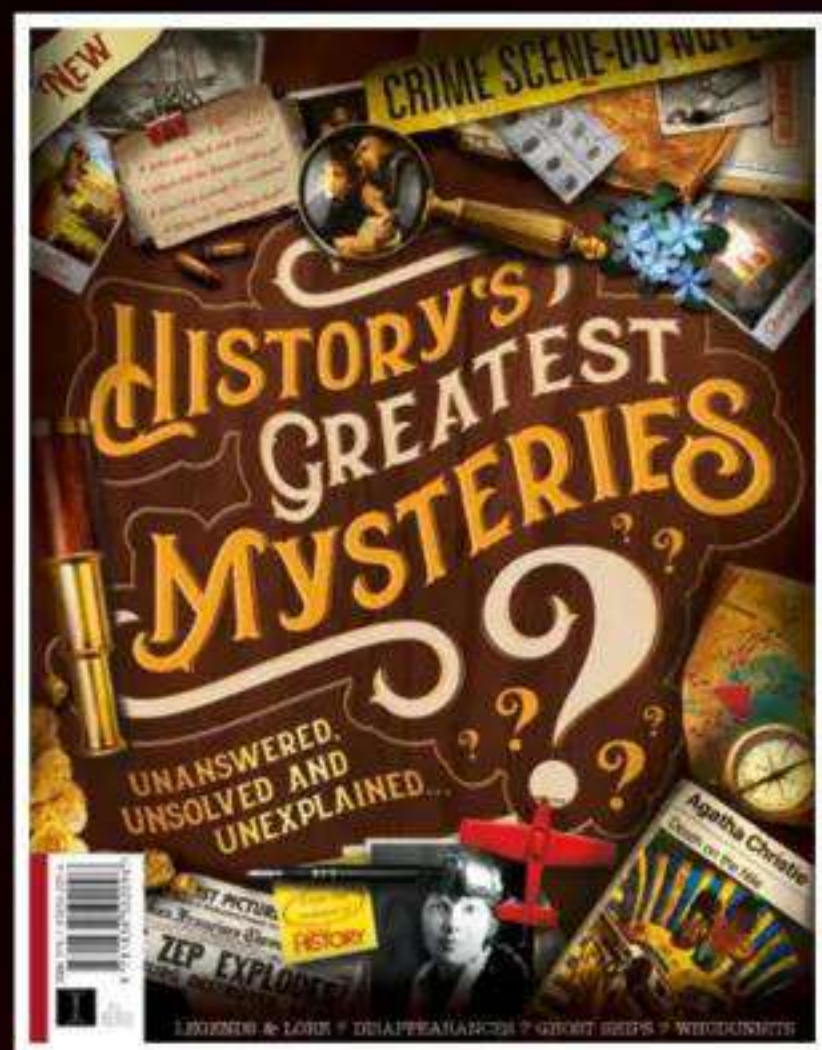




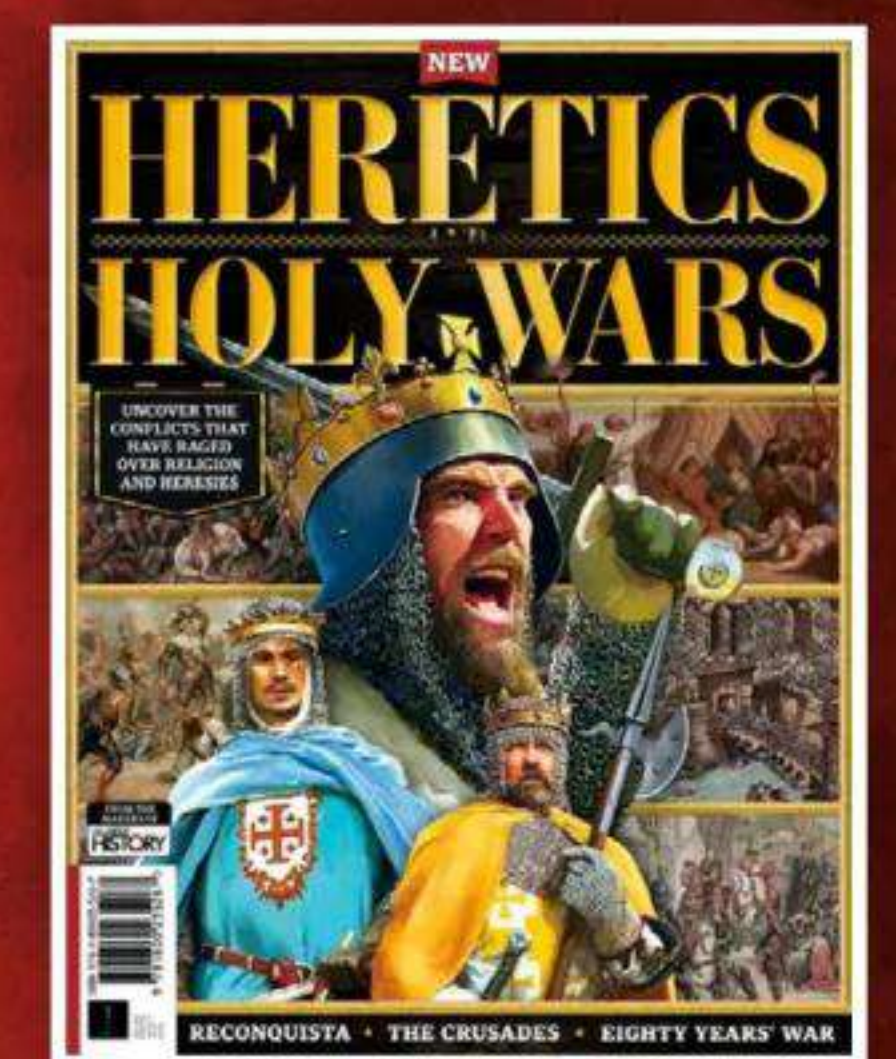
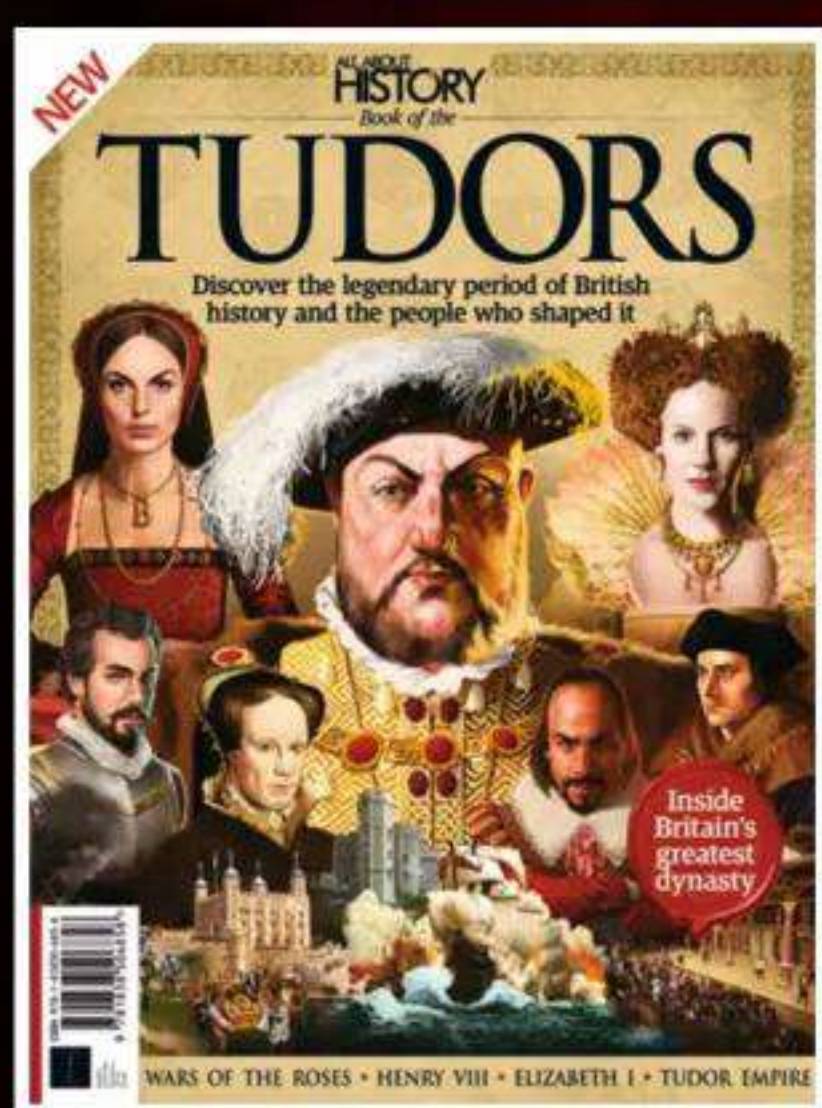
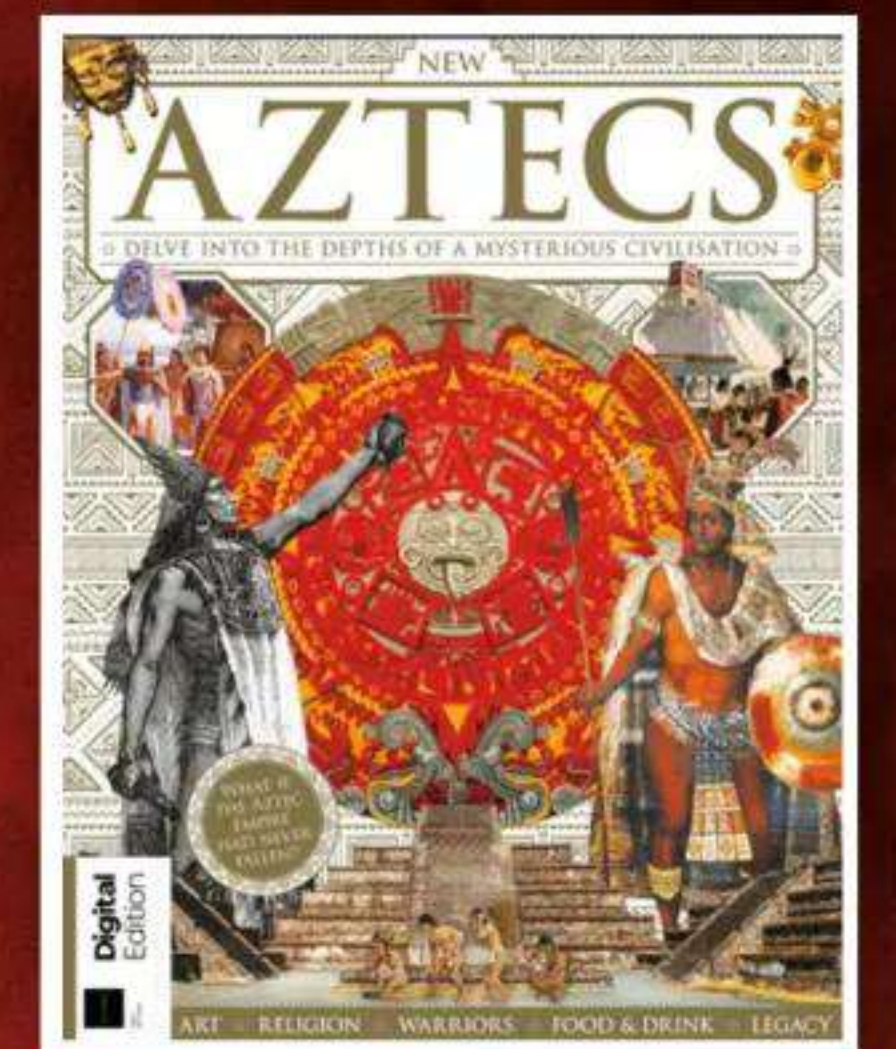
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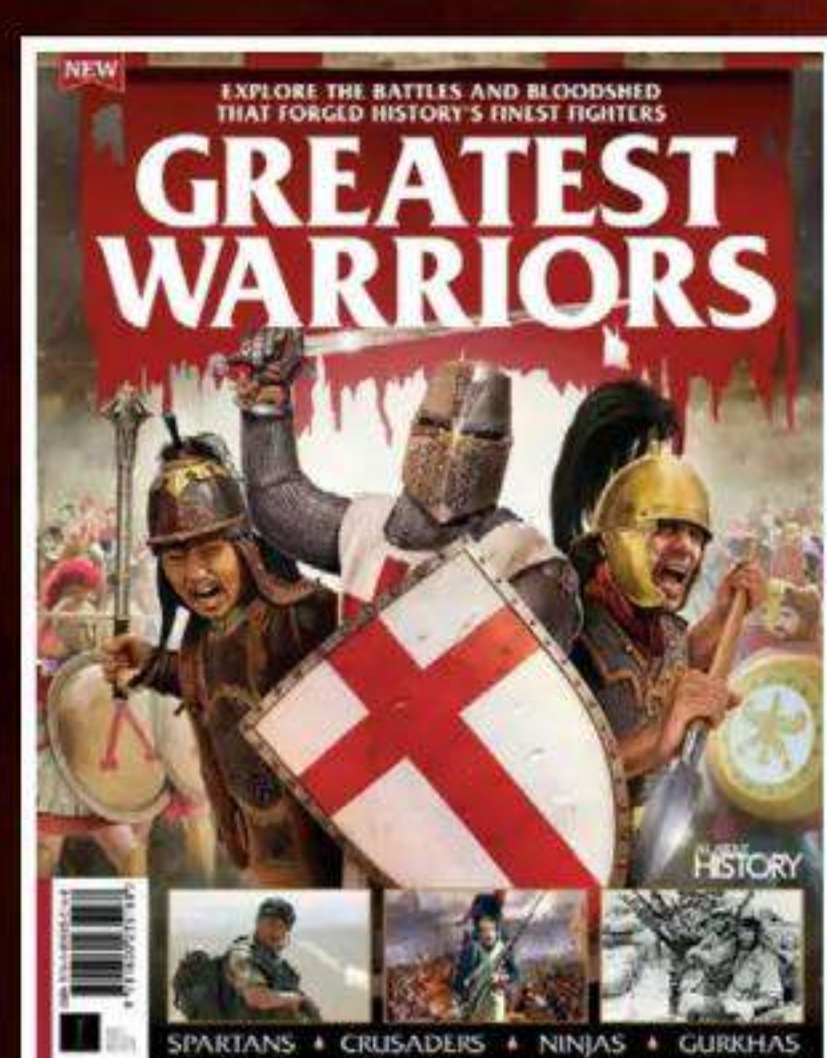
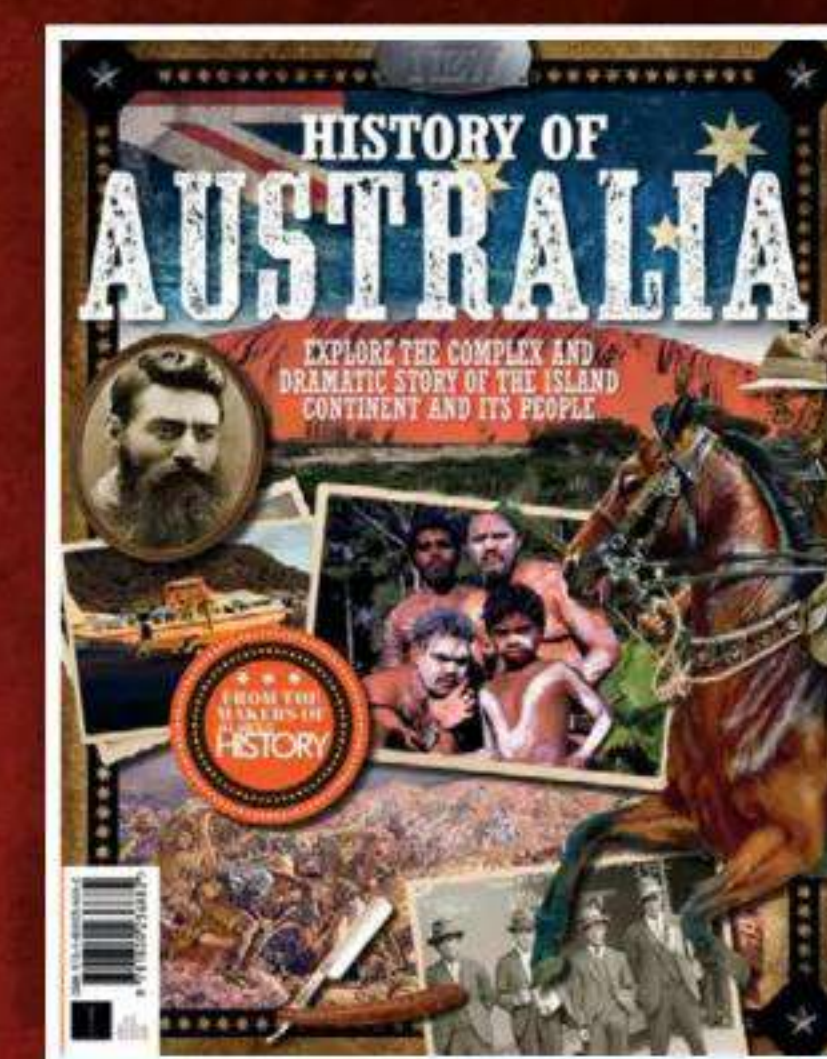
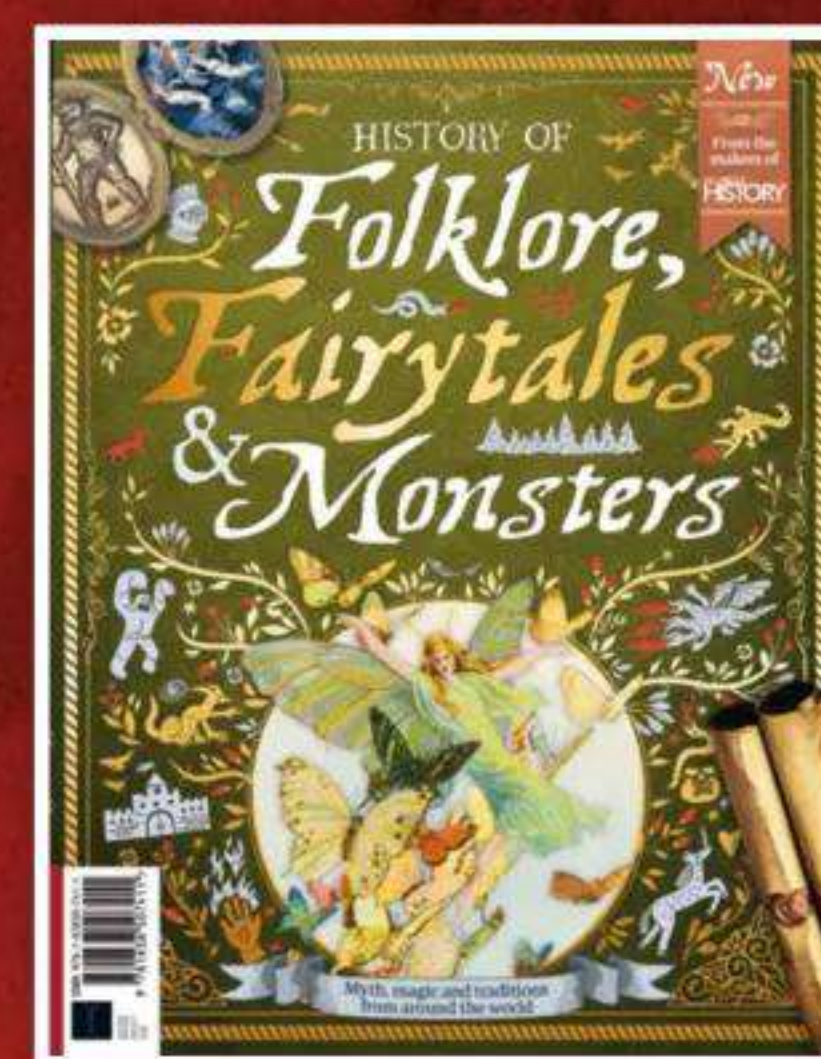
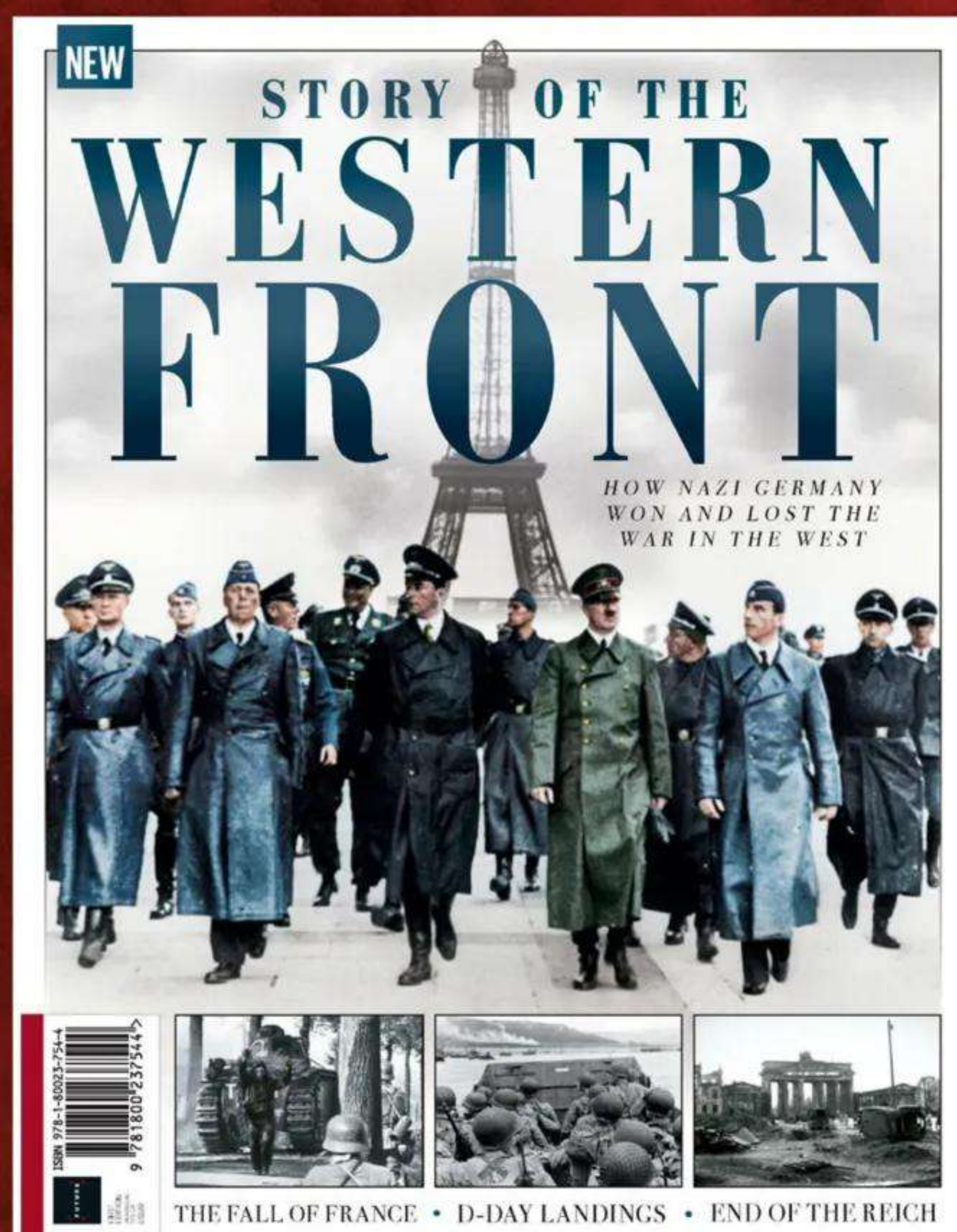
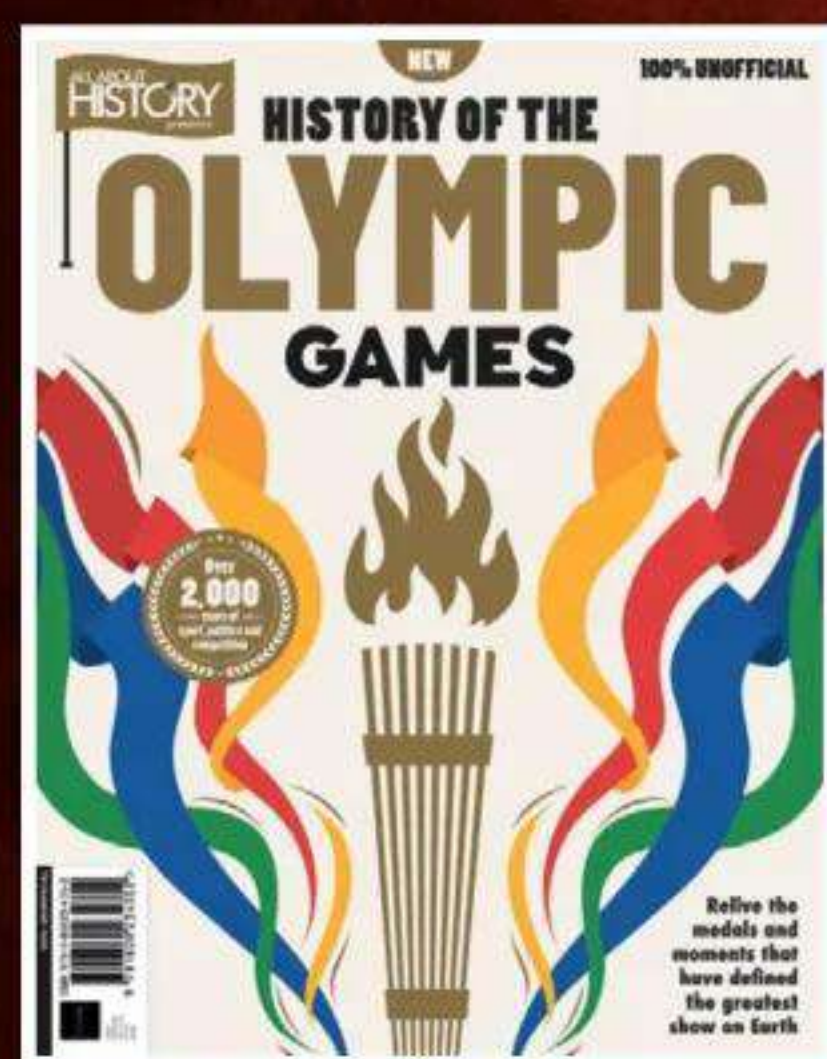


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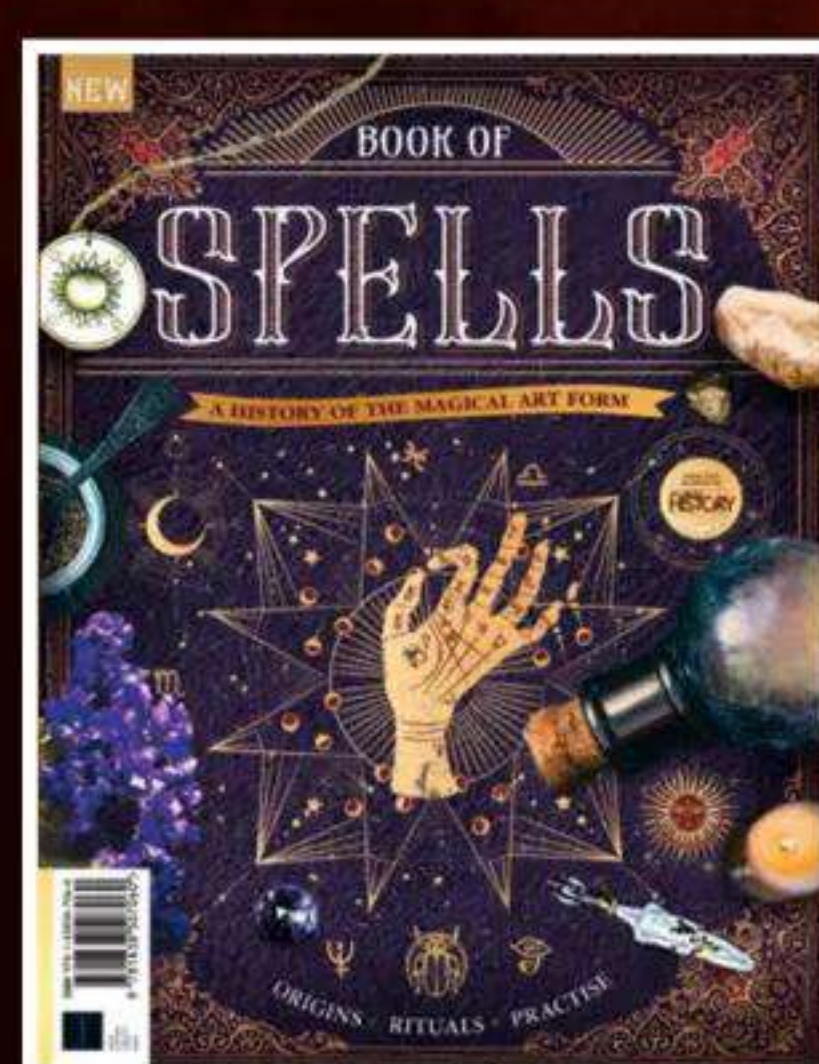
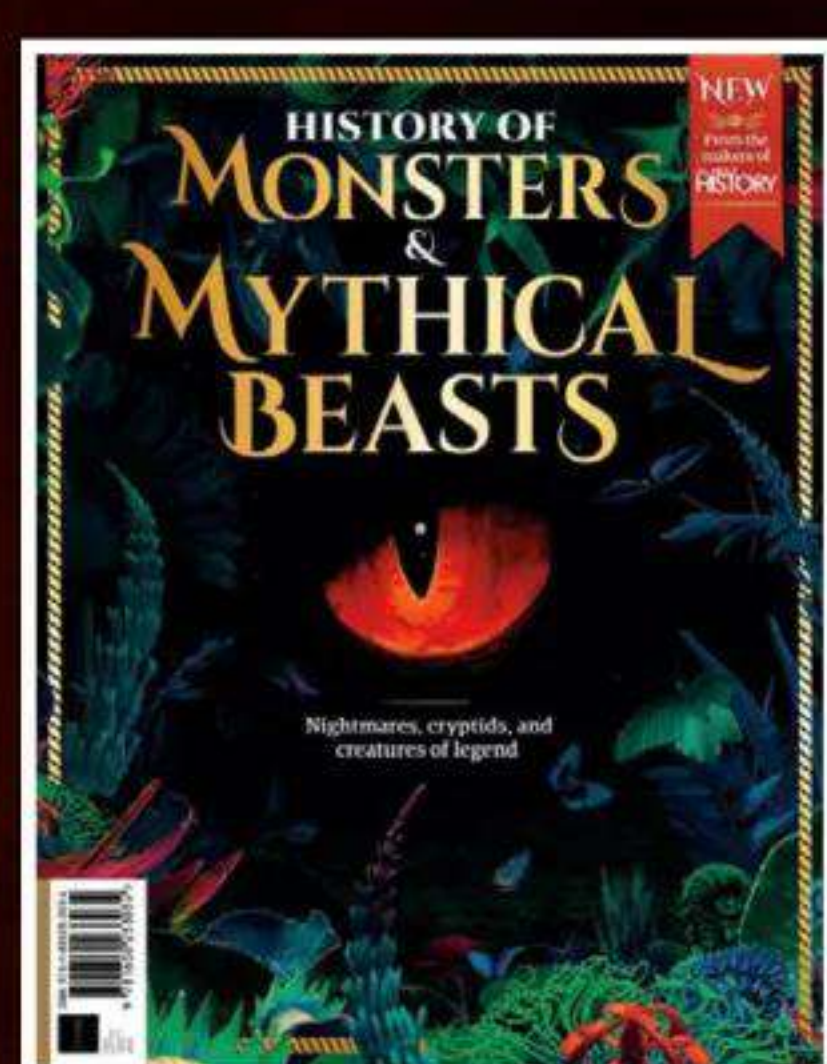
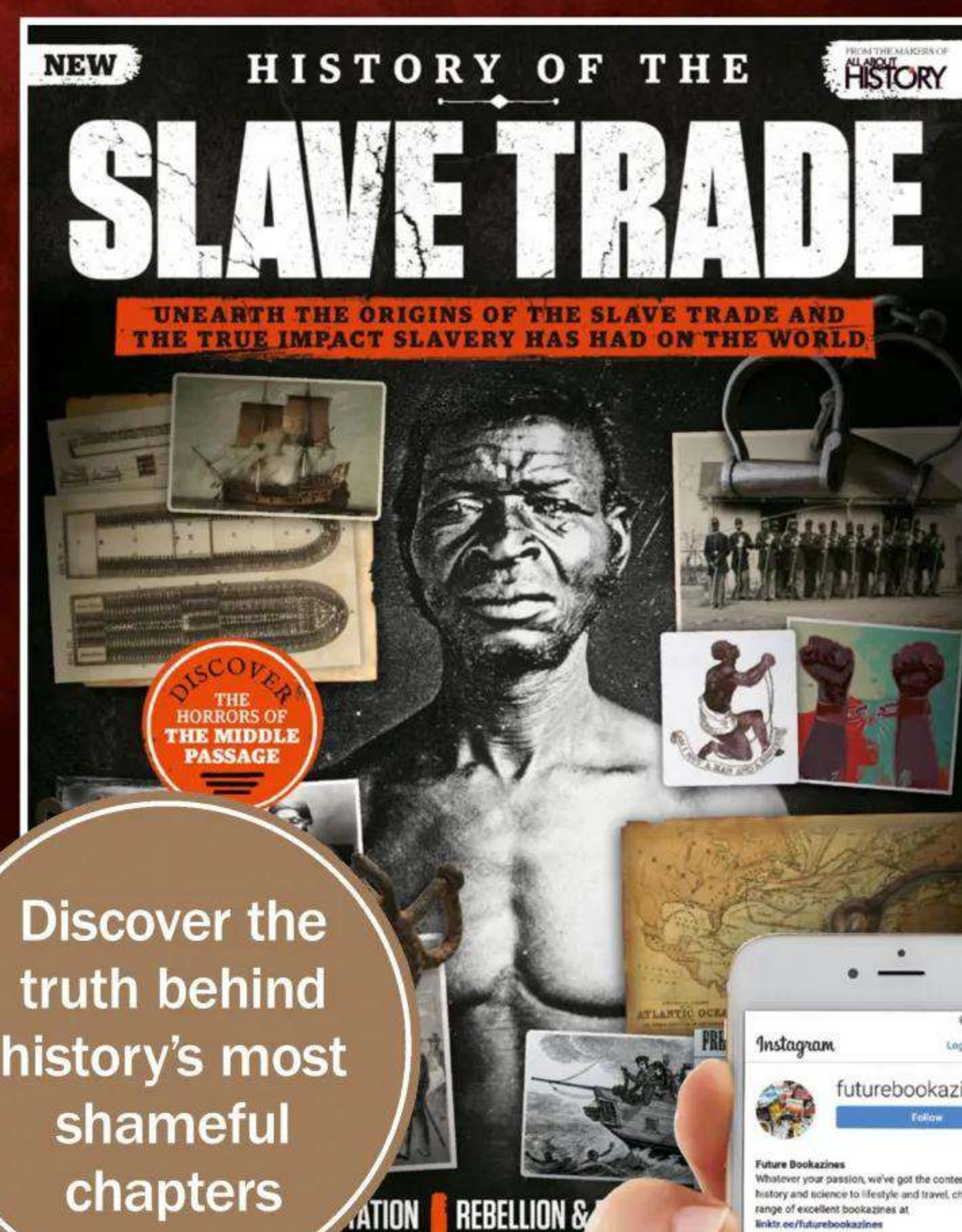
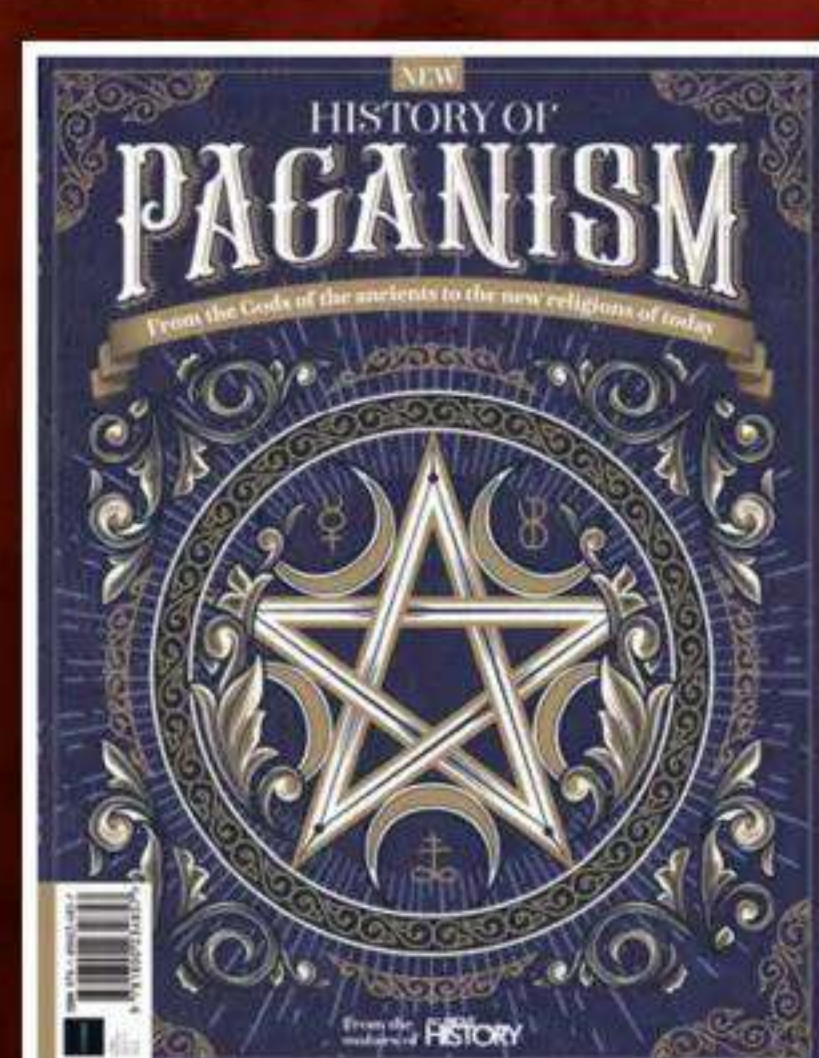
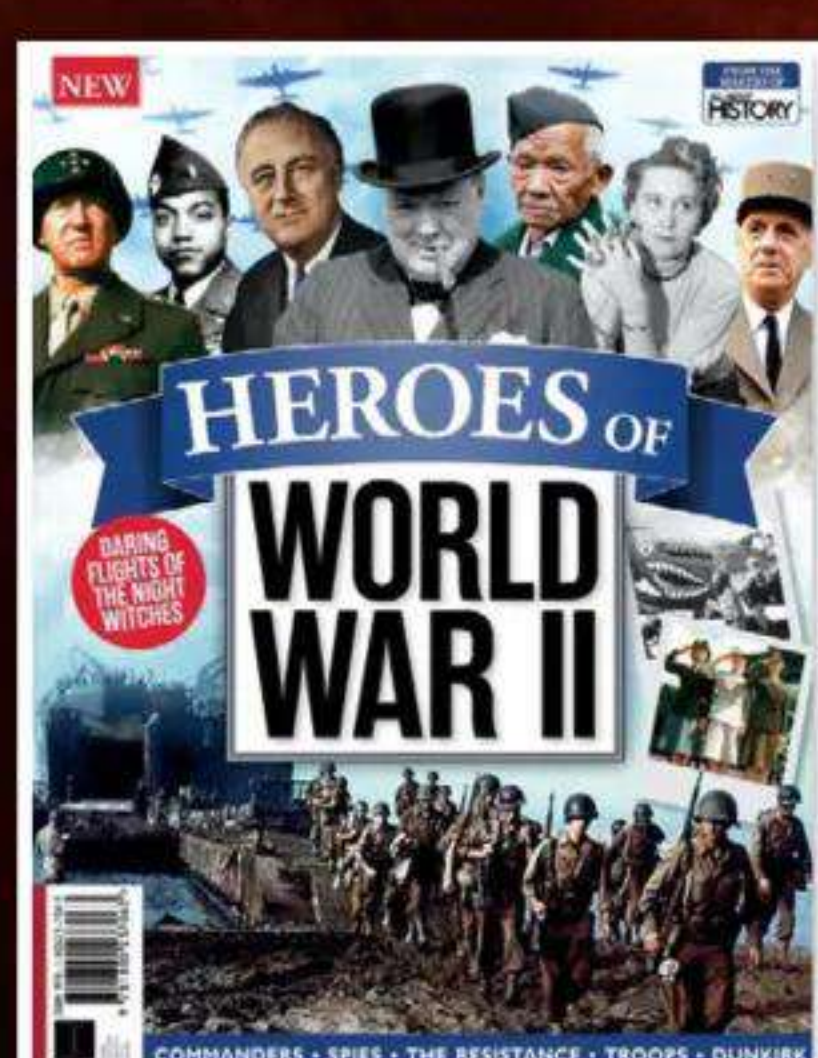
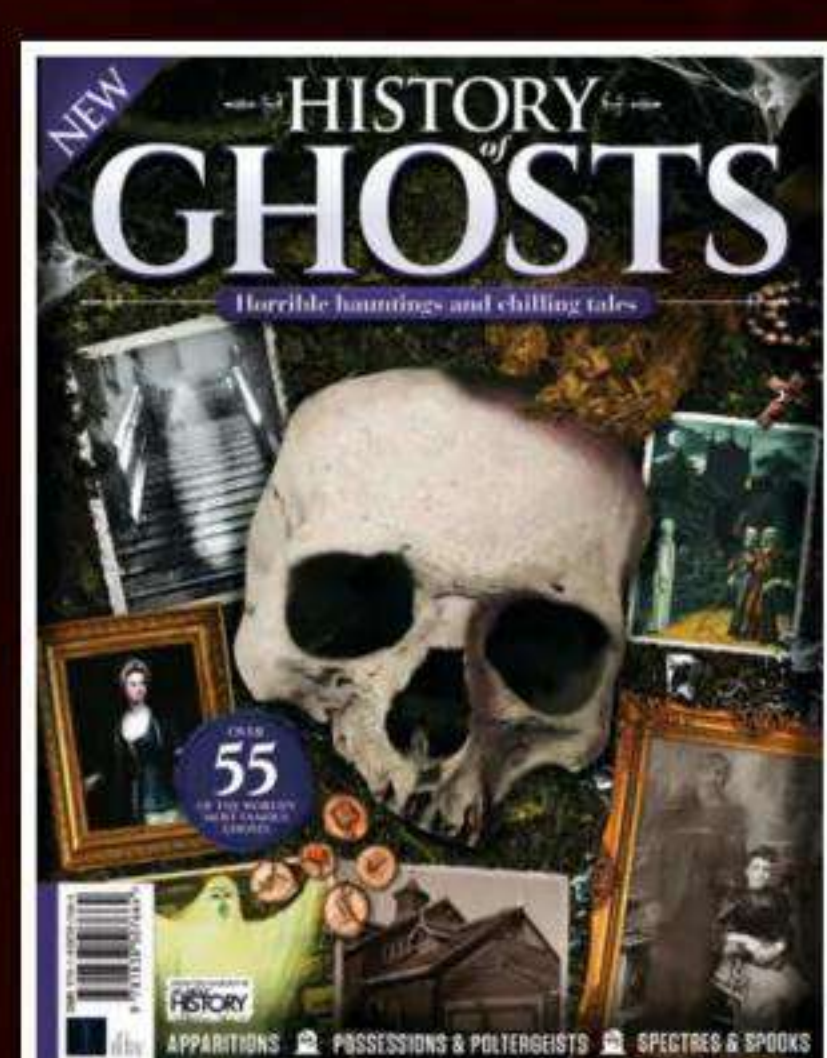
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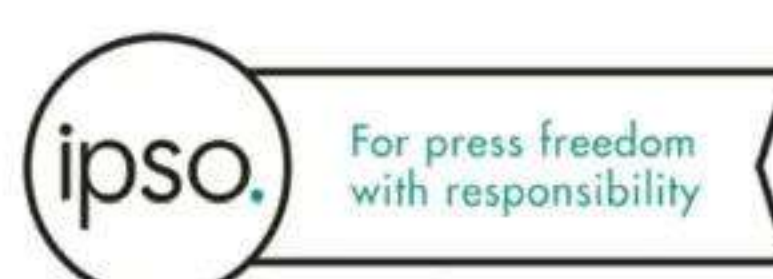
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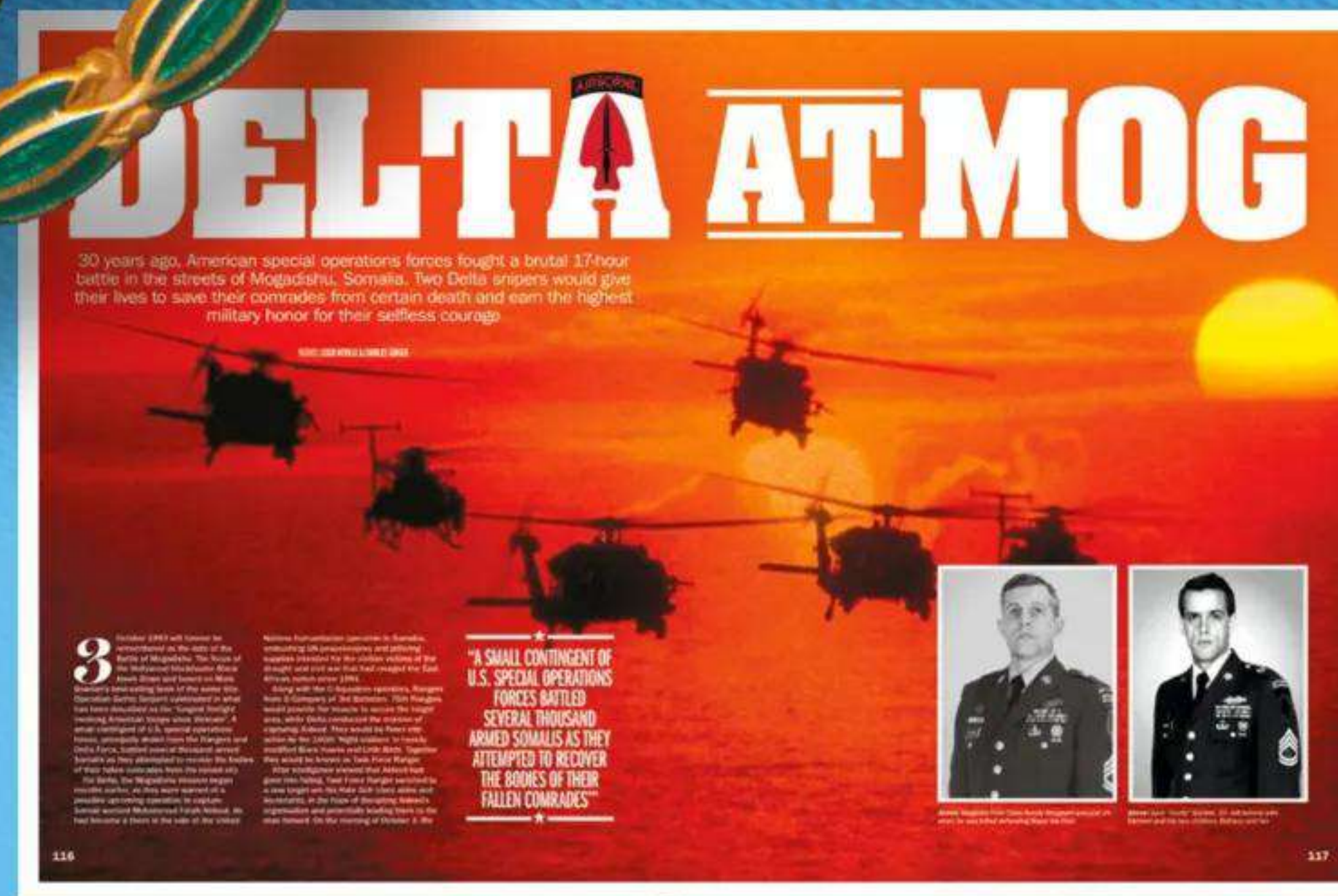
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